

MANAGING THE OPENNESS – CLOSEDNESS DIALECTIC:
HOW GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS HANDLE THE TENSION

By

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Abstract

Graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) are a pervasive part of undergraduate education. When interacting with undergraduate students, GTAs must balance a tension of being a friend and an authority figure with students. One of the ways that balance is managed is through GTA self-disclosure. Self-disclosure is defined as, “the act of revealing personal information to others” (Jourard, 1971, p. 2). Prior research has linked instructor self-disclosure to positive learning outcomes. The current study, therefore, examined the ways in which GTAs balance a dialectic between being open and closed with their private information in the classroom.

Rooted in communication privacy management theory (Petronio, 1991), relational dialectics theory (Baxter, 1988), and the affective learning model (Rodriguez, Plax, & Kearney, 1996), this qualitative study examined: (1) how GTAs make decisions about what private information to disclose to students; (2) GTA motivations for self-disclosing to students; and (3) GTA perceptions of the effects of self-disclosure on undergraduate learning.

Twenty-three, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with GTAs at a large Midwestern University. Participants were asked to talk about their experiences and perceptions of self-disclosure in higher education classrooms. Data were inductively coded to reveal 13 overarching themes regarding GTA self-disclosure. Results revealed that GTAs make decisions about self-disclosure by: considering the nature of topics, learning about a culture of self-disclosure, and balancing a friendship-authority dialectic. Data also indicated that GTAs are motivated to self-disclose: for interpersonal reasons, to increase credibility, for reciprocity, to explain course content, to keep students’ attention, and to

improve student evaluations. Results also suggested that GTAs perceive that self-disclosure: makes them more approachable, increases student motivation, is a useful tool for explaining course content, and can assist students' retention of course material.

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Chapter One: Introduction and Rationale

Lisa Neher¹ is a typical graduate student in many respects. She is pursuing a master's degree in music composition at the University of Kansas and works as a graduate teaching assistant (GTA). Lisa is required to work approximately 20 hours a week for her assistantship in return for a tuition waiver and a stipend of approximately \$900.00 a month (Carrns, 2011). Most of her days begin at 6:00 a.m. and do not end until late at night, as she often works long days to fulfill the duties for her assistantship, in addition to keeping up with her full-time graduate work. Lisa's graduate teaching assistant experience of working long hours and receiving little pay is one that, according to Lee, Osequara, Kim, Fann, Davis, and Rhoads (2004), is familiar to many graduate teaching assistants across the United States. Lee et al. (2004) note:

An underlying assumption linked to their [GTA] temporary organizational status is a sense that being overworked and underpaid is to be expected. As one graduate employee admitted, "I think some of my peers, especially in the sciences see themselves as temporarily marginalized workers and can tolerate this because they know something better awaits them." (p. 351)

Although graduate teaching students may complain about their circumstances, the positions are highly sought after and very competitive (Carrns, 2011). The competitive nature of graduate teaching assistantship positions illuminates the need for current graduate teaching assistants to do their job well. Teaching assistants want to do well and even excel for a variety of reasons, including to: keep their graduate school funding, build their curriculum vitae, gain experience, and get high praise/evaluations, all in the hope that

¹ Lisa Neher is a student at the University of Kansas. The information about her experience as a GTA comes from a *New York Times* article, in which she was interviewed.

they will be obtain a tenure-track faculty position upon the completion of their graduate work. All of these goals can hinge on teaching assistant's ability to properly manage relationships with their students (among other factors).

There are numerous ways in which teaching assistants can build and maintain relationships with students. Communication research has illustrated many instructor behaviors that can improve student learning, including: fairness (Faranda & Clark, 2004), nonverbal immediacy (Chesebro & McCroskey, 1998; Christophel, 1990; Frymier & Houser, 2000; Mottet, Parker-Raley, Cunningham, & Beebe, 2005), clarity (Chesebro & McCroskey, 1998), caring (Teven & McCroskey, 1997), rapport building (Catt, Miller, & Schallenkamp, 2007; Frisby & Martin, 2010; Frisby & Myers, 2008; Nguyen, 2007), and humor (Gorham & Christophel, 1990). In addition, and of particular interest to the current study, instructor self-disclosure has been linked to positive classroom outcomes (Cayanus & Martin, 2008; Down, Javidi, & Nussbaum, 1988; Sorensen, 1989).

Self-disclosure is defined as, "the act of revealing personal information to others" (Jourard, 1971, p. 2). Self-disclosure has been examined in a number of educational settings. For example, Down et al. (1988) found that exceptional teachers use self-disclosure in the classroom to clarify course content. Other studies (Cayanus & Martin, 2008; Sorenson, 1989) have shown positive correlations between instructor disclosure and students showing positive affect toward the course (affective learning). Research has also shown a positive connection between instructor self-disclosure and student participation (Goldsein & Benassi, 1994). The effects of self-disclosure on student learning outcomes are not limited only to the classroom, however. DiVerniero and Hosek (2011) showed a positive relationship between viewing an instructor's online social networks and a positive

interpersonal relationship. Mazer, Murphy, and Simonds (2007) also found that disclosure can be linked to higher student motivation, improved affective learning, and a positive classroom climate.

The fact that past research has demonstrated a connection between instructor self-disclosure and positive outcomes in the classroom raises a question about what instructors choose to disclose to students and why they choose to do so. McBride and Wahl (2005) sought to answer this question by examining what college instructors disclose to students and their motivations for doing so. They found that instructors chose to disclose certain types of information (e.g., personal histories and daily activities) and to conceal other types of information (e.g., sexual topics and negative aspects of their character). The research by McBride and Wahl (2005), although closely related to this current research, focused on a wide variety of college instructors and not specifically on graduate teaching assistants (GTAs).

The current study, therefore, examines how graduate teaching assistants manage their disclosure with students. Specifically, this study examines the privacy management rules that GTAs establish when considering self-disclosure with undergraduate students, the motivations for GTAs to disclose private information to students, and GTA perceptions of the pedagogical effectiveness of self-disclosure in undergraduate classes.

Graduate Teaching Assistants

A graduate teaching assistant, according to Park and Ramos (2002), is defined as:

Any postgraduate student who teaches (usually undergraduate students) part-time, on a paid basis, for a department, while also engaged as a research student at the university, working on supervised research towards their higher degree. (p. 47)

In other words, GTAs are required to balance the requirements of being both a graduate student and an instructor. Research has shown that being a graduate student can be difficult in its own right; Smallwood (2004) posits that attrition rates for Ph.D. programs are generally somewhere between 40 and 50 percent. In addition, Lee et al. (2004) assert that GTAs often experience role conflict about being both an instructor and a graduate student, as functioning effectively in multiple roles can be difficult to manage for GTAs. They also stress that GTAs not only struggle with balancing different roles, but these multiple roles can, at times, be in direct conflict with one another:

A second barrier linked to the graduate student subculture centers around the multiple and sometimes conflicting roles graduate student employees fill. Graduate students have responsibilities as students and therefore are concerned with their academic work. Additionally, graduate students serving as teaching assistants have significant responsibilities in educating undergraduates. Balancing these roles is challenging, and different campus constituencies define such roles in varying ways.

(Lee et al., 2004, p. 351)

Not only do GTAs feel conflict about whether they are students or instructors, but they also feel a need to balance mixed messages about their roles from varying groups of people. Kendall and Schussler (2012) posit that undergraduate students see GTAs in an in-between role between a student and professor; GTAs see themselves as students with teaching responsibilities; and faculty members see GTAs as research students who also function as apprentices. Varying emphases placed on different GTA roles could send mixed messages to GTAs about how they are to spend their time and energy.

GTAs also struggle with identity issues, in addition to balancing their workloads.

Kasworm and Bowles (2010) discuss the identity crisis that GTAs can develop:

Most doctoral students face disjunctures between their sense of self as an adult, their placement as a novice in an expert scholar community, and their development of this new identity as a scholar and knowledge creator. (p. 225)

This identity crisis can also affect the way that GTAs view their relationships with undergraduate students. GTAs not only have to manage their roles as both student and instructor, but must also manage aspects of their relationship with students. Worley, Titsworth, Worley, and Cornett-Devito (2007) note that classroom relationships are essential to learning. Further, Tsui (1996) notes that, “establishing a good relationship with students is extremely important in creating a conducive learning atmosphere in the classroom” (p. 164). GTAs are placed in the difficult position of being both a person of authority (an instructor) and person without authority (a student). Hennings (2009), in a study on GTA identity, posited that GTAs struggle with balancing a dialectic of distance and closeness with undergraduate students, which “emerges from GTAs’ conflicting desire to be both authority figures and confidantes in the classroom” (p. 42). Hennings’ (2009) study revealed that GTAs need to feel like they have earned students’ respect, while at the same time feel like they have connected with students on a personal level.

In spite of perceived identity dilemmas, graduate teaching assistants are a ubiquitous element of higher education. The United States Department of Labor (2010) stated that there were 108,000 graduate assistants employed in American universities. Carrns (2011) states that approximately 25% of all doctoral students and 5% of all master’s students receive a teaching assistantship, and approximately the same

percentages of graduate students receive research assistantships. In 2006, there were over 500,000 students enrolled in either master's or doctoral programs in the United States (Redd, 2006), and each year American universities grant over 60,000 doctoral degrees (Mason, 2012). Clearly, there are a large number of graduate students competing for assistantships, and one could assume that the competition will only get tougher as the number of graduate students in America continues to rise. Brown (2011) argues that the number of graduate students in the United States has grown by 57% since 1988.

Another aspect contributing the competitive nature of GTA positions is budget constraints. Universities around the country are cutting new GTA positions due to a lack of funds. In fact, when applying to doctoral programs in 2008, I was told by a department head at a top-tier research university that his department was only hiring three GTAs out of approximately 150 applicants, when in years past they had accepted 10 or more GTAs annually. In another example, Carlos J. Alonso, a Dean at Columbia University's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, said that Columbia had reduced its admission of doctoral students by approximately 10% in 2009 due, in part, to the economy (Carrns, 2011). Although, a recent study (Johnson, 2011) posits that universities are increasingly depending on part-time faculty, non-tenure track faculty, and graduate teaching assistants to teach classes, GTAs positions are regularly being cut and replaced with adjunct positions. Carrns (2011) argues that universities are electing to hire more adjunct professors, instead of GTAs, because adjuncts do not require tuition waivers.

Perhaps an even greater factor that arises from budget constraints and contributes to the competitive nature of GTA positions is the lack of tenure-track positions available

upon graduation. Mason (2012) explains how GTAs are faced with an ever-increasing grim job market upon the completion of their terminal degrees:

Over the past 30 years, universities have relentlessly reduced the centrality of tenure in higher education. Full-timers who were either tenured or on the tenure track made up 55 percent of the teaching faculty in 1970, 1975, and 1980. Since then, various federal data sets document the steady growth of adjunct positions and the decline of tenure-track jobs in the academic work force. By 2007, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, tenured and tenure-track academics constituted only 31 percent of the teaching faculty while 49 percent worked part time and 12 percent were non-tenure-track full-timers. (p. 2)

If recent Ph.D. graduates are unable to obtain full-time employment, and are forced to take a position among the approximately 70% of non-tenure-track professors (i.e., adjunct/part-time instructors, lecturers, teaching fellows) they are faced with a daunting task of paying back student loans (among other expenses) on a drastically lower salary (Mason, 2012).

According to Patton (2012) adjunct professors are paid, on average, \$2,500 per course, without receiving any additional benefits, which means that, if an adjunct were to teach a 4/4 load in both the fall and spring semesters, he or she would make approximately \$20,000. This is a significantly lower salary than what a new assistant professor would make. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education (2011), new assistant professors at four-year colleges and universities make, on average, \$53,000 annually in the field of Communication Studies and \$93,000 annually in the field of Business.

In spite of the level of competition for both GTA positions and tenure-track faculty positions, GTAs have long been and continue to be utilized in the United States higher

education system, particularly in teaching introductory undergraduate classes (Meyers, 1998; Park, 2004). Anderson (1992) claims that GTAs are routinely utilized in undergraduate education. Although GTAs may be commonplace in American higher education, it does not mean that GTAs are experienced and/or trained well to manage a healthy and balanced classroom environment. Research has shown that GTAs are often concerned about their shortcomings as instructors (Lee et al., 2004).

Thus, it is understandable, for a few reasons, why GTAs are concerned about their abilities to effectively manage a classroom. First, GTAs are usually younger than professors, thus giving them less of an opportunity to gain teaching experience. Waldeck, Orrego, Plax, and Kearney (1997), in researching professor-graduate student relationships, stated that doctoral students were, on average, 30 years old, while professors were, on average, 45 years old. In other words, GTAs are in their 20's and early 30's, while professors are in their 40's and beyond. Semlak and Pearson (2008) discovered that instructors' age affects the way that students perceive their instructor's credibility; simply put, the research revealed that older instructors were perceived to be more credible than their younger colleagues. Not only are GTAs often younger, but many also have no prior teaching experience (Shannon, Twale, & Moore, 1998). GTAs are at a disadvantage in the classroom from both their lack of experience and because of a student perception that they aren't as credible as professors.

Second, GTAs should be concerned about their ability in the classroom due to a lack of proper training. It is not uncommon for GTAs to be required to take only one seminar (if any) on pedagogy, while being required to take five or more seminars on research. Young and Bippus (2008) state that training programs for master's only GTA programs are rarely

offered at all. Young and Bippus (2008) also point out that there has been significant research pointing out the shortcomings in GTA training programs. Lowman and Mathie (1993) revealed that pedagogy and managing interpersonal relationships were often overlooked in GTA training programs, and emphasis was instead often placed on subjects such as university policy.

Purpose of the Current Study

All humans function in their relationships through a variety of dialectics. One particular dialectic that individuals must manage is between being open or closed when considering sharing personal information with others. Graduate teaching assistants, a fundamental component of higher education, must also consider the boundaries that they establish in regard to sharing private information with students. Research on GTA self-disclosure is particularly important given the lack of experience and training that GTAs receive.

Therefore, this study seeks to provide better understanding on the topic of GTA self-disclosure. First, the study provides new understanding in the ways in which GTAs manage self-disclosure with undergraduate students. Second, the study provides knowledge about motivations for GTA self-disclosure. Third, study provides insight as to how self-disclosure affects undergraduate learning.

In this study, chapter one explicates a rationale for why this research is important, focusing on why GTAs need to manage self-disclosure to students. Chapter two examines relevant theoretical perspectives, specifically literature on relational dialectics, communication privacy management, and instructor-student relationships. In addition, research questions that guide the study are presented in chapter two. Chapter three

presents the methods that were used to answer the research questions. Chapter four provides the results of the current study's research questions. And, finally, chapter five provides a brief summary of the findings, as well as the implications of the findings for theory and practice. Limitations of the present study and directions for future research are also offered in chapter five.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter provides an in-depth look into relevant literature for this study, focusing on the theoretical perspectives that help shape research on GTA self-disclosure. Specifically, this chapter examines the areas of relational dialectics, privacy management and communication, and how self-disclosure can affect instructor-student relationships and student learning.

Relational Dialectics Theory

Relational dialectics theory (Baxter, 1988) posits that people live their lives in the tension between a variety of dialectics. The central concept of relational dialectics theory is contradiction, which is described as a unity of opposites (Baxter, 2004b). Those in a relationship must learn to handle the contradictions that exist in their relationship. Baxter asserts that dyads manage contradictions through dialogue with one another. Baxter (2004a) discusses how contradictions function within a relationship:

Contradictions are not located in individual heads, serving as dilemmatic goals that direct individual's communicative strategies. Rather, from a dialogic perspective, contradictions are located in the communication between relationship parties. (p. 184)

Baxter has spent a significant amount of her career illustrating how people manage a number of different dialectics, one of which is the dialectic between being open and being closed (or the openness-closedness dialectic). This dialectic is at the heart of how and why people have a hard time deciding what to disclose to others (self-disclosure); although people want to be open and divulge information with others, they are also faced with a

desire to keep some information private. At the crux of the current study is the openness-closedness dialectic.

Baxter's interest in dialectics began by studying the work of Altman, Vinsel, and Brown (1981) on the subject of openness in relationships (Baxter, 2004a). When other relationship researchers were examining how open communication occurred, Baxter took an interest in how non-open communication (e.g., taboo topics) worked in relationships (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985). An interest in non-open communication lead Baxter to examine how relationships function in the space between open and non-open communication, which later lead to the development of relational dialectics theory (Baxter, 1988).

Baxter's early research also arose out of studying the work of the Russian philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin's dialogism theory (1984) emphasized that life exists in the tension of opposites. Within a world of dialectics, people function and make sense of their worlds by participating in dialogue and social interaction. Bakhtin (1984) explained the way in which dialogue plays a role in life:

The single adequate form for verbally expressing authentic human life is the open-ended dialogue. Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his [sic] whole life: with his [sic] eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his [sic] whole body and deeds. (p. 293)

Baxter (1988) eventually applied the philosophical assumptions of Bakhtin to interpersonal relationships so they could be empirically tested.

In the early stages of the development of relational dialectics theory, Baxter placed significant interest in the notion of contradiction (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). In other

words, emphasis was placed on the dualistic nature of dialectics, and how people manage and balance them within their relationships (Baxter, 2004a). Baxter and Sahlstein (2000) make the point, however, that the meaning of balance is not always clear in relationships, thus creating a rationale for researchers to understand how individuals conceptualize balance based on context. To better understand how humans find balance in different contexts, it is important to understand the issues that people most often find to be dialectical in nature.

The core dialectics. The core dialectics, in addition to openness-closedness, are novelty-predictability and autonomy-connection (Baxter, 1988). Baxter (1988) made the point that each of the dialectics has implications for dyads both internally and externally. Internal dialectics refer to the dialectics that people deal with within their relationship, or in private. External dialectics are the dialectics that individuals deal with between those in the relationship and those within their community and networks.

The novelty-predictability dialectic emphasizes how those in relationships are faced with a tension between a desire for surprise, excitement, new experiences, as well as a desire for stability, the reduction of uncertainty, and familiar experiences. Internal manifestations of this dialectic include a struggle between certainty and uncertainty within a couple's private life, such as deciding on whether or not to eat at new restaurants or watch different television shows. External manifestations include a battle between conventionality and uniqueness within a couple's social network, such as deciding on whether to adhere to relationship standards and norms (such as changing one's last name upon marriage).

The autonomy-connection dialectic speaks to the tension between the desire that individuals have to be connected with others and the desire to feel like and be seen as a unique individual. Internally (autonomy-connection) couples are faced with deciding how much of their time, energy, and identity is spent with the other relationship partner. Externally (inclusion-seclusion), couples face the tension of sharing their time with others and being separate from others.

As noted earlier, the openness-closedness dialectic illustrates how those in a relationship struggle between privacy and disclosure. Internally, dyads are faced with decisions about whether they will express their feelings to one another or to be non-expressive. Externally, couples are faced with the dialectic of revelation-concealment, or deciding upon whether they will share the existence of their relationship with others.

Relational dialectics research. Relational dialectics have been examined in a number of interpersonal contexts, including: romantic relationship turning points (Baxter & Erbert, 1999); marital conflicts (Erbert, 2000); and romantic relationship development (Baxter, 1990). In each of these contexts, the openness-closedness dialectic is consistently found to be exceptionally important and prominent in relationships.

For example, Baxter and Erbert (1999) examined how dialectics function in turning-point events in heterosexual romantic relationships. Turning points are defined by Baxter and Erbert (1999) as, “occasions of heightened intensity in which the pressures of dialectical interplay change the relationship in some way” (p. 551). Baxter and Erbert (1999) interviewed heterosexual romantic dyads in regard to turning points in their relationships. In the interviews, couples were asked about their perception of the importance of six basic dialectical contradictions (autonomy-connection, openness-

closedness, inclusion-seclusion, revelation-concealment, predictability-novelty, and conventionality-uniqueness). Baxter and Erbert (1999) found that autonomy-connection and openness-closedness were the dialectics of the greatest importance to couples across the widest variety of turning points.

In another study, Erbert (2000) examined the same six relational dialectics (i.e., autonomy-connection, openness-closedness, inclusion-seclusion, revelation-concealment, predictability-novelty, and conventionality-uniqueness) in relation to marital conflict. In interviews with 25 couples, the researcher asked participants to recall conflicts that they had encountered over a one-year period. The study revealed that the openness-closedness and autonomy-connection dialectics, again, were perceived to be more important than the other dialectics across a wide variety of interpersonal conflicts

In a different study, Baxter (1990) examined the relational dialectics of autonomy-connection, openness-closedness, and predictability-novelty, across the different stages of romantic relationship development. The study revealed that the contradictions were present in approximately 75% of all stages of relationship development. Further, the study indicated that the openness-closedness contradiction was more prominent than the other two contradictions (i.e., autonomy-connection and predictability-novelty) in the initial stages of relationship development, while autonomy-connection and predictability-novelty increased in importance and prevalence in subsequent relationship development stages.

The results of the Baxter (1990) study have major implications for the current study, specifically in the emphasis placed on the openness-closedness dialectic in the earliest stages of relationship development. Although instructor-student relationships have been characterized as “interpersonal” (Frymier & Houser, 2000), they are often bound

by time in the development process. Instructors usually only have 15 weeks or less and approximately three hours a week to build a relationship with a student, thus often making it very difficult to move beyond initial relationship development stages. After the semester ends, the instructor-student relationship may even cease to exist. In other words, a case could be made that almost all instructor-student relationships exist in initial relationship development stages, which places the greatest emphasis on the openness-closedness dialectic.

Managing the openness-closedness dialectic, in romantic relationship and in other relationship contexts (i.e., friendships, work relationships, instructor-student relationships), forces people to examine what they will disclose and to whom they will disclose. The management of dialectical tensions is often regulated by a set of rules and criteria for disclosure. These rules are examined and explained by Petronio's (1991, 2000, 2004) communication privacy management theory.

Communication Privacy Management

Petronio (1991) developed communication privacy management (CPM) theory to explain how people handle and negotiate the openness-closedness dialectic. Concerned with understanding how self-disclosure is managed in interpersonal relationships, CPM was built upon social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973), which examines how the breadth and depth of disclosure affects interpersonal relationship development (Petronio, 2004). Based on the fact that individuals are constantly dealing with a tension between being open and being closed, Petronio (1991) asserts that people come up with ways to manage this contradiction. Petronio, Sargent, Andea, Reganis, and Cichocki (2004) describe the core concept of CPM, stating:

The theory [CPM] proposes that people manage the flow of private information in relationships by constructing both personal and collective boundaries around private information that are owned by individuals and with others. (pp. 37-38)

CPM speaks to the dialectical nature of disclosure, and is based on prior research that posits that managing disclosure is more fruitful than being completely open (Levinger & Senn, 1967). Petronio (2004) points out that disclosure functions on two levels: not only the information being disclosed (i.e., the content/topics), but also the process, or the rule management process (Petronio, 2002), that goes into disclosure (i.e., deciding whom to share with and how to share). When applied to instructor-student disclosure, CPM would postulate that instructors set up formal and informal rules about what, and the extent to which, they will disclose to students.

Petronio et al. (2004) state that a fundamental assumption of CPM is that people believe that they own their private information. Another fundamental assumption of the theory is that individuals feel a need to control their information, because disclosing private information has the potential to make a person vulnerable (Petronio et al., 2004). Because disclosure can cause people to feel vulnerable, people establish boundaries to minimize risks involved (Petronio, 2007).

Tenets of CPM. Petronio (2007) discusses the five tenets upon which CPM has been built: ownership, control, rules, co-ownership, and turbulence.

Ownership. The first principle of CPM, ownership, is that individuals believe that they own their own private information. Petronio et al. (2004) posit that, “Individuals establish and enact rules that are idiosyncratic to their personal privacy boundaries because they are sole owners of the information” (p. 38). This is an important starting

point when thinking about self-disclosure, because when an individual believes that he or she owns something, he or she will be more likely to think about the implications for disclosure, thus creating a more selective disclosure process (Petronio, 2002).

Control. The second principle of CPM, control, is that people believe they have the right to control the flow of private information to others. The second principle is a logical subsequent step after ownership. Put simply, because people believe that they own information, they also believe that they get complete control over who gets co-ownership of that information. Setting up control over one's privately owned information is done by "constructing both personal and collective boundaries" (Petronio et al., 2007, p. 38). These boundaries are constructed to control who has access to certain information.

Rules. The third principle of CPM, rules, is that people use privacy rules to manage the flow of their private information by deciding whether to conceal or reveal information to others. According to Petronio (2002) individuals may base disclosure rules on their relationship to a potential recipient, the type of information that is being held, or a combination of both factors. These rules are not set in stone, but are derived from a number of criteria. Petronio (2002) posits that people make decisions about self-disclosure based on the following criteria: motivations for disclosure, cultural values, risk factors, context, and expectations based on gender.

Co-ownership. The fourth principle of CPM, co-ownership, is that once an individual decides to self-disclose to another, the original owner of the information expects the new shareholder to follow existing privacy rules or negotiate new ones, because the original owner believes that the information is now jointly owned by the dyad (Petronio et al., 2004). In short, a recipient of private information is seen as a confidant by the person

who discloses (Petronio, 2004). However, the expectation to follow privacy rules is not always clearly communicated by the original information owner, which can cause problems; these are discussed in the final principle.

Turbulence. The fifth principle of CPM, turbulence, is that information management issues can become difficult or turbulent. Turbulence occurs when people fail to follow the rules and/or norms of information sharing. Turbulence can also occur when the original owner fails to give clear expectations of privacy management to new shareholders. Petronio et al. (2004) also point out that turbulence can occur when people share too much information, which illustrates Petronio's (2004) claim that disclosure can sometimes have more negative effects than positive. Petronio et al. (2004) explains a situation in which turbulence might exist:

For example, consider the case of a father going in for a follow-up visit to the physician with his adult daughter after his heart surgery. Turbulence might erupt if the father assumes that his daughter automatically 'knows' that she should not mention her father's smoking habits to the physician. Because the father and daughter had not coordinated rules before the visit, the daughter might judge that she had the right and obligation to tell the physician so she could help her father. (p. 39)

Situations like the one just described can be avoided if clear rules about sharing private information are established and followed by all owners of the information.

Criteria for establishing rules. The criteria that people follow in constructing and following disclosure rules are central to the present study. The criteria are important because they are a central aspect of the disclosure process and likely affect how instructors

make decisions about disclosure. The five criteria outlined by Petronio (2004) are culture, gendered criteria, motivations that people have concerning privacy, contextual constraints, and the risk-benefit ratio of sharing.

Culture. Culture is important because it often regulates the norms that people operate within. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) defines culture as a:

historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men [sic] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life (p. 89).

Similarly, Damen (1987) defines culture as:

Learned and shared human patterns or models for living; day-to-day living patterns. These patterns and models pervade all aspects of human social interaction. Culture is mankind's [sic] primary adaptive mechanism. (p. 367)

The effects of cultural criteria could be considered at various levels, such a national, regional, or local, like the workplace (Petronio, 2000). Certain cultures might encourage privacy while another culture might have a norm of free and open disclosure. For example, as Petronio (2000) points out, cultural differences in self-disclosure are often revealed when individuals from Western cultures interact with individuals from East Asian cultures. In most cases, Westerners are seen as being more open and willing to self-disclose, while East Asians are typically seen as being more private and less willing to self-disclose.

Gender. A criterion of gender is also important to consider when constructing disclosure rules. Gender has been defined a social structure (Risman, 2004), that differs from traditional biological definitions of men and women. Gender, as a social structure,

recognizes that both men and women's identities as masculine or feminine are socially constructed. Therefore, privacy rules are fashioned in different manners by men and women based on socialized sets of needs in regard to disclosure (Child & Petronio, 2011). For example, Petronio (2000) asserts that when considering sharing private information, women will focus more on the potential recipient of their information, while men will focus more on situational criteria. In other words, women tend to take a more person-centered approach when contemplating self-disclosure, and men tend to take a more topic-centered approach to sharing private information.

Motivations for disclosure. Motivations for privacy management can vary depending not only on context, but also on interpersonal motives such as attraction and liking (Petronio, 2002). Petronio (2000) asserts that motivations for disclosure typically fall into three categories: information based (i.e., the content of information), individual based (i.e., a shy individual being more likely to withhold private information), and relationship based. An example of a relationship-based motivator would be an individual feeling comfortable sharing a particular piece of information with his or her spouse, because the couple have a good relationship, while simultaneously withholding the same information from his or her in-laws, due to their a poor relationship with them.

Context. Privacy rules can function on a relatively stable level or certain situations can cause rules to change (Petronio, 2000). Child and Petronio (2010) assert that, "context serves as a catalyst for changing personal or collectively held privacy rules" (p. 29) because of a need to meet the urgent needs of a particular life event (Petronio, 2002). In other words, contextual criteria may be altered to temporarily outweigh the influence of gender, culture, or other criteria. For example, Petronio (2002) points out that people are often

willing to risk the safety of their financial information when needing to use online banking or buy products online. Child and Petronio (2010) also posit that individuals might share private information when organizations offer promotional materials, such as free products or discounts.

Risk-rewards. Similar to the foundational principles of social exchange theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), the risk-benefit ratio criterion forces a person to examine the potential outcomes of disclosure. The risk-benefit ratio of disclosure causes one to ask oneself questions like: “What am I going to get out of sharing this information with this particular person? What are the positives? What are the negatives? Do the positives outweigh the negatives? Or do the negatives outweigh the positives?” Petronio (2002) speaks to the need to analyze risks, stating, “One reason we find it necessary to control our privacy boundaries is because we need to balance the risks and gains of revealing private information” (Petronio, 2002, p. 65). If potential positives outweigh potential negatives, then a person will likely invite a person to be a shareholder of information. Conversely, if the negatives outweigh the positives, then a person will likely withhold the information from a particular potential shareholder, or from people all together. For example, Child and Petronio (2010) make the point that individuals constantly balance risks and rewards by sharing private information via social networking sites; rewards might come in the form of improved interpersonal relationships, while risks can occur from blending personal and work lives in a public forum.

CPM applied to instructor-student relationships. CPM is a theory that, according to Petronio, was “built to be of practice” (Petronio, 2007, p. 218). For example, CPM has been used to examine how and why sexually abused children share information about their

abuse (Petronio, Reeder, Hecht, & Ros-Mendoza, 1996), to numerous health care situations (Allman, 1998; Greene, Derlega, Yep, & Petronio, 2003), and to examine various family and friend situations (Afifi, 2003; McBride & Bergen, 2008; Petronio et al., 2004; Petronio, Jones, & Morr, 2003). Of particular importance to the current study, however, is CPM's application to instructor-student relationships (McBride & Wahl, 2005).

Educators are no exception to the implications of CPM. GTAs, functioning in the classroom, must establish boundaries when considering whether, what, and when to disclose to students. GTAs often begin their time in the classroom with little to no training, particularly in the area of how to properly share information with students (especially information that might otherwise be considered private and only relevant for close relationships). Therefore, GTAs are faced with the task of figuring out how to establish, negotiate, and enforce their own rules and boundaries with students in the context of a classroom.

In the McBride and Wahl (2005) study referenced earlier, communication instructors were asked to describe what personal information they disclosed to their students in the classroom. Participants in the study were asked to keep a teaching diary over a two-week period in the middle of a semester about their self-disclosure with students. More specifically, 15 instructors were asked to write about what they most often revealed and their motivations for disclosing information. At the end of the two-week period, participants (i.e., instructors) completed a questionnaire to discuss the topics that they concealed from students and their motivations for doing so.

Four topics were found to be disclosed most often by instructors: (1) families (e.g., how one met his/her spouse), (2) personal feelings or opinions (e.g., instructor perceptions

of individuals who skip class), (3) daily outside activities (e.g., getting a membership at a workout facility), and (4) personal histories (e.g., dating history) (McBride & Wahl, 2005). The study also found that professors did not necessarily disclose something personal to students every day that they taught.

Instructors also completed a questionnaire reporting the information that they withheld from students. The topics most often withheld were: (1) personal information (e.g., instructor salary), (2) negative personal relationships (e.g., negative comments about other faculty), (3) sexual topics (e.g., sexual orientation), and (4) negative aspects of character or image (e.g., anything that would put the instructor in a bad light) (McBride & Wahl, 2005).

Instructors were also asked what motivated them to disclose personal information to students. Two main themes emerged from the instructor's responses. First, McBride and Wahl (2005) found that participants most often decided to reveal personal information to extend course content (i.e., sharing an example about work experience in an organizational communication class). Second, professors disclosed in an attempt to connect on an interpersonal level and to relate to students (i.e., sharing hobbies with students) (McBride & Wahl, 2005).

The McBride and Wahl (2005) study provided evidence that the openness-closedness dialectic is something that higher education instructors must deal with on a regular basis. McBride and Wahl (2005) found that instructors not only have to manage the openness-closedness dialectic, but they must also manage a friendship-authority dialectic in the classroom. Managing one's interpersonal relationships with students in the classroom is critical, because positive instructor-student relationships have been linked to

improved student learning. The current study builds upon the McBride and Wahl (2005) study by providing an in-depth qualitative analysis of GTA-specific self-disclosure.

Instructor-Student Relationships

The scholarship of instructional communication is a relatively new field of study within communication studies. The International Communication Association (ICA) created the Instructional Communication Division in 1972 in an attempt to promote research examining the relationship between communication and instruction (Worley et al., 2007). The division has had slight variations in its emphases over the last 40 years, but the main focus of the division and its research has always been the to “discover various ways in which communication influences students’ learning, motivation, and behaviors” (Worley et al., 2007, p. 207). When measuring student learning, many communication researchers (e.g., McCroskey, Valencic, & Richmond, 2004) have taken a relational approach (Mottet, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2006) to instructional communication, which, rooted in interpersonal communication scholarship, places emphasis on how interpersonal behaviors affect learning outcomes.

Over the last 40 years, a wide variety of instructor behaviors and their connections to student learning have been examined. To provide an understanding of the ways in which instructor behaviors have been studied, an overview of three important instructor-student relationship variables will be provided: instructor-student immediacy, instructor-student rapport, and teacher misbehaviors.

Immediacy. One of the most oft-researched instructor behaviors in the instructional communication realm is immediacy. Coined by Mehrabian (1996), immediacy is defined as “a perceived physical and psychological closeness between teachers and

students” (Mottet et al., 2006, p. 169). Immediacy has been linked to a wide variety of positive educational outcomes. For example, Chesebro and McCroskey (1998) established that immediacy, coupled with instructor clarity, reduced students’ apprehension in the classroom. Another study (Mottet et al., 2005) found that instructor immediacy positively correlated with student willingness to engage in learning, operationalized through reading, writing, and speaking. Other studies have found that instructor immediacy is correlated with student motivation to learn (Christophel, 1990) and high student ratings of instruction (Moore, Masterson, Christophel, & Shea, 1996).

Rapport. Faranda and Clark (2004) explain that rapport is established when a relationship is built on attributes such as mutual trust and harmony. Similarly, Nadler (2007) defines rapport as “a state of positive mutual attention marked by harmony and affinity” (p. 9). Further, Gremler and Gwinner (2000) have operationalized rapport in two ways: personal connection and an enjoyable interaction. Rapport in the college classroom has been examined in several different studies (e.g., Catt et al., 2007; Coupland, 2003; Frisby & Martin, 2010; Frisby & Myers, 2008; Nguyen, 2007) and is increasingly being viewed as essential to building instructor-student relationships. Faranda and Clark (2004) also list rapport as one of the top six attributes that students believe make up good instructors, and McLaughlin and Erickson (1981) report that rapport is indispensable characteristic of being an “ideal” instructor.

Teacher misbehaviors. Not all instructor behaviors, however, are necessarily viewed positively by students. Instructor behaviors that violate student’s expectations are called teacher misbehaviors. Kearney, Plax, Hays, and Ivey (1991) initially described 28 teacher misbehaviors, that are classified across three broad categories of behavior: (1)

incompetence (e.g., boring lectures, overloading students with work, setting arbitrary rules); (2) offensiveness (e.g., sarcasm toward students, favoritism); and (3) indolence (e.g., absent mindedness, tardiness, being disorganized). Goodboy and Bolkan (2009) found that teacher misbehaviors can hinder students' affective learning (or feelings toward the course), which can lead to a reduction of cognitive learning (or retention of course material). Goodboy and Bolkan (2009) further explain this process, stating, "When affective learning is compromised, students may communicate in undesirable manners and learn less" (p. 214).

Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning. Examining student learning is not exclusive to the field of Communication Studies, however. Benjamin Bloom, an educational psychologist, led a team of researchers in 1956 in a project to determine what types of learning exist. This research led Bloom and his team to determine that there are three types of learning outcomes: cognitive, psychomotor, and affective. Bloom's (1956) research is particularly important for the current study because it provides a rationale for studying the learning outcome of affective learning. This designation of different learning outcomes is referred to as Bloom's (1956) Taxonomy of Learning.

Cognitive learning. Cognitive learning refers to the process of one gaining knowledge and developing intellectual skills (Bloom & Krathwohl, 1956). Ellis (2004) defines cognitive learning as the recall, knowledge, and the development of skills related to course content. Cognitive learning can be measured by an individual recalling facts and/or utilizing critical thinking skills. This type of learning is usually assessed through some form of standardized testing by measuring what a person has learned from one point to another (e.g., the middle of a semester to the end of a semester).

Psychomotor learning. Psychomotor learning demonstrates one's ability to efficiently complete a physical task (Bloom, 1956). Examples of physical tasks to measure include coordination, physical movement, or any other demonstration using motor-skills. To effectively measure the outcome of this type of learning, one would be tested in terms of outcome variables such as speed, technique, or precision (e.g., running, throwing, etc.)

Affective learning. Affective learning has been described in two different, yet related ways. First, affective learning has been explained as one's ability to manage emotions (Bloom & Krathwohl, 1956). Emotional abilities could be characterized as how individuals direct their feelings, motivations, or attitudes. In this way, then, affective learning has been depicted in a five-level hierarchy (Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1964). Beginning on the bottom level, the hierarchy includes: (1) one's ability to listen, (2) a person's capacity to respond in interactions with others, (3) one's faculty to consider attitudes appropriate to certain contexts, (4) one's ability to organize values that demonstrate balance in consideration of others, and (5) at the highest level, an individual's faculty to be consistent on a day-to-day basis.

A more recent description of affective learning (Frisby & Martin, 2010) builds upon Bloom and Krathwohl's (1956) definition of affective learning, by applying student's emotional abilities in the classroom. In other words, affective learning refers to the emotions that students feel about their educational experience. In particular, affective learning has been measured by examining a student's affect toward course content, his or her affect toward enrolling in another course with similar content, and his or her affect toward the course instructor (Frisby & Martin, 2010).

Affective Learning Model. The affective learning model (ALM) (Rodriguez, Plax, & Kearney, 1996) theorizes that positive instructor behaviors are essential to building relationships between students and instructors. Positive instructor-student relationships can, in turn, help generate favorable affect toward both the instructor and the class, which in turn can improve cognitive learning. In the affective learning model, affective learning is the causal mediator between instructor behaviors and cognitive learning. Rodriguez et al. (1996) further explain the relationship between instructor behaviors and cognitive learning. These authors posit that instructor behaviors, “*cause* students to acquire or increase positive attitudes toward the subject and/or the teacher and in turn, this affective learning *causes* the student to learn cognitively” (Rodriguez et al., 1996, p. 296).

ALM was created to build and improve upon the Learning Model (Frymier, 1994) and the Motivation Model (Frymier, 1994) of learning. The Learning Model suggests that there is direct causal relationship between instructor behaviors and both affective and cognitive learning. The Motivation Model, however, hypothesizes that the relationship between instructor behaviors and student learning is indirect and mediated by student’s state motivation to learn. Rodriguez et al. (1996) found that ALM improved upon the other two by models in three ways: (1) ALM is more parsimonious; (2) ALM explains causality better than the other two models; and (3) motivation to learn is better explained as the affective learning construct.

Research Questions

In this chapter, three theoretical concepts have been examined. First, relational dialectics theory literature was reviewed. Specifically, research on the openness-closedness dialectic was examined. Second, communication privacy management was

overviewed, focusing on the ways in which individuals control/manage their private information. Third, literature on instructor-student relationships was examined, with a particular focus on affective learning. Based on the literature regarding relational dialectics, privacy management, and instructor-student relationships, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1: How do GTAs decide what kind of personal information to disclose and what to withhold from undergraduate students in the classroom?

RQ2: Why do GTAs decide to either disclose or withhold information from their undergraduate students?

RQ3: How do GTAs describe the results of instructor disclosure on educational outcomes in the classroom?

Chapter Three: Method

This study sought to gain a better understanding of GTA self-disclosure; specifically, how GTAs manage their private information with undergraduate students, the reasons why GTAs self-disclose to students, and GTA perceptions of the effects of self-disclosure on student learning. This chapter outlines the method used to garner information about GTA self-disclosure. Specifically, this chapter covers the following topics: (1) the rationale behind the methods selected for this project, (2) a description of the participants in the study, (3) an explanation of the interview guide used in this project, (4) how data were managed, and (5) specific data analysis techniques that were used for this study.

Research Methodology Justification

To answer the research questions posed in this study, qualitative research methods were employed. Qualitative research assumes people live by interpretations and that humans produce and maintain meaning in their lives (Clifford & Carey, 1989). Qualitative research seeks to provide richness and depth in its analysis. Qualitative investigation “typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases ($N = 1$), selected purposefully” (Patton, 2002, p. 230).

Sutton (1993) conjectures that there are four main benefits of conducting research in a qualitative manner: contextualization, understanding, pluralism, and expression. Contextualization refers to the goal of qualitative research to not separate data from its environment that gives it meaning. Understanding, in qualitative research, indicates an openness to connect data with a wide variety of theories that can help explain phenomena. Pluralism, goes against the idea of universal truths, and refers to the belief that truth is conceived differently in each individual context. Expression denotes a way of explaining

one's research in a manner different than what is done in other research methods. In qualitative inquiry, data is explained as representations of the researcher's observations.

Worley et al. (2007) make a case for using qualitative research methods in instructional settings, by positing that the vast majority of instructional research has traditionally followed the tenets of logical empiricism (Friedrich & Nussbaum, 2005). Worley et al. (2007) explain the benefits of qualitative inquiry in a recent study conducted on award-winning teachers:

Because instructional communication has generally emphasized quantitative snapshots of classroom behavior, our objective was to use interpretive methods to generate a more holistic view of classroom effectiveness. More specifically, we observed and interviewed award-winning teachers to gain a better understanding of how they enact instructional communication competence in their classrooms. In essence, we sought to complement existing instructional communication literature by offering thick descriptions of how teachers communicate in the classroom and to what ends. (p. 208)

My goal, in this study, was to use qualitative methods, in the same vein as Worley et al. (2007), to gain a better understanding of how GTAs manage their self-disclosure.

Role of the Researcher and Research Context

When utilizing qualitative research methods, the researcher is often viewed as a research instrument that affects the data collection process (Eakin & Mykhalovskiy, 2003). Thus, it is important to examine the researcher's experience and biases. Therefore, I will provide an explanation of my academic experience and discuss potential biases that I brought to the research process.

I obtained undergraduate and graduate degrees in psychology, with my master's degree focusing on counseling psychology. My experience in a professional graduate program, as opposed to research program, no doubt shaped my views on academic research. When looking for Ph.D. programs, I sought out programs that were open to practical research that employed qualitative methods. I found a Ph.D. program in Communication Studies that fit this description, and spent two years learning and practicing qualitative research methods under faculty supervision, particularly in the area of instructional communication. I spent the majority of my time researching instructor-student relationships and the ways in which these relationships affect undergraduate learning outcomes. Therefore, I came into the current study with a belief that relationships between college instructors and undergraduate students fundamentally affect student learning.

In addition, the Communication Studies Department that I studied in is the same department that the study's participants researched and taught in. Therefore, I had an existing professional relationship with participants. Having an existing relationship with participants had both positive and negative effects on the research project. On one hand, my relationship with participants provided easy access to research participants. In addition, I had an established rapport with participants, which may have lead to increased participant disclosure. On the other hand, participants may have self-monitored their self-disclosure during the research process, in order to make them look better in front of a colleague.

As a GTA researching other graduate students' experiences, I was likely biased by own experiences as a GTA. This study, at its roots, came from observations that I made in

the college classroom. In particular, my experience as both a student and instructor, gave me numerous opportunities to witness self-disclosure. Examining both positive and negative examples of self-disclosure lead me to have an interest in how these disclosures affect student learning. Therefore, my experience likely shaped the way that I framed this study, the way I asked questions during the interview, and the way that I analyzed the data.

Participants

After submitting an application to the university's institutional review board (see Appendix 1) and receiving permission for the methods and procedures for this study (see Appendix 2), 23 research participants (M age = 30.03, SD = 7.13, 11 males, 12 females) were recruited from the Communication Studies Department at a large Midwestern research university. The university in which research was conducted is the largest university in the state, with over 30,000 students and approximately 2,500 faculty. The Communication Studies Department is comprised of approximately 40 GTAs, 24 non-GTA graduate students, and 16 full-time faculty. The Department of Communication Studies offers undergraduate students a major and minor, and offers graduate students a master's degree and a Ph.D. All participants in the current study were pursuing doctoral degrees in Communication Studies.

Participants averaged just less than five years of teaching experience at the college level (M = 4.82, SD = 2.04). At the beginning of their tenure as a GTA at the research site, each participant was required to participate in a workshop for new GTAs and take part in a semester-long pedagogy class. Each participant was also required to begin his or her teaching career at the university by teaching COMS 130, a public speaking class. Many participants then went on to teach classes in a variety of areas within Communication

Studies (e.g., organizational communication, interpersonal communication, and rhetoric). In addition, both students and faculty regularly evaluated participants' teaching abilities; participants were evaluated by students on an every-semester basis and by faculty on an annual basis.

Although all participants were obtaining Ph.D.s in Communication Studies, their research emphases within the field varied. Participants self-identified as focusing on 39 different research emphases: rhetoric ($n = 12$, 31%), interpersonal communication ($n = 7$, 18%), organizational communication ($n = 6$, 15%), technology ($n = 3$, 8%), gender ($n = 3$, 8%), intercultural communication ($n = 2$, 5%), political communication ($n = 2$, 5%), argumentation ($n = 1$, 3%), environmental communication ($n = 1$, 3%), ethnography ($n = 1$, 3%), and new media ($n = 1$, 3%). Of the 23 participants in the study, 16 (70%) mentioned having more than one research emphasis. Participants self-identified as White ($n = 21$), Black ($n = 1$), and Asian ($n = 1$). To protect the identity of the study's participants, pseudonyms have been used in place of real names (see Table 1). In addition pseudonyms have been used in place of the actual names of individuals mentioned (e.g., professors, colleagues, students) by participants.

Participant requirements. To be eligible to participate in the study, individuals were required to be a graduate teaching assistant in the Communication Studies Department at the university in which the research was conducted. Also, participants were required to have at least two years of teaching experience prior to taking part in the study. One's research interests or specific classes taught did not disqualify anyone from being a part of the study. In other words, all GTAs in the Communication Studies Department with at least two years of teaching experience were eligible to participate in the study.

Table 1

Participants: Communication Studies Graduate Teaching Assistants

Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Communication Research Interest	Years of Teaching
Creighton	Male	41	Intercultural/Interpersonal	10
Becca	Female	56	Rhetoric/Organizational	8
Wesley	Male	42	Rhetoric	8
Ann	Female	27	Rhetoric/Gender	7.5
Dirk	Male	33	Rhetoric/Argumentation	7
Corbin	Male	27	Organizational/Environmental	6
Catherine	Female	29	Interpersonal/Organizational	5
Derek	Male	31	Rhetoric	5
Kimberly	Female	26	Interpersonal/Technology	5
Kyla	Female	29	Rhetoric/Gender	5
Dani	Female	26	New Media/Interpersonal	4
Emily	Female	27	Organizational/Rhetoric	4
Emmit	Male	27	Political	4
Gerald	Male	31	Rhetoric	4
Hallie	Female	27	Organizational/Gender	4
Thomas	Male	26	Rhetoric/Technology	4
Valerie	Female	25	Rhetoric	4
Jacob	Male	30	Interpersonal/Intercultural	3.5
Isaac	Male	26	Interpersonal/Ethnography	3
Kristin	Female	30	Political	3
Bonnie	Female	26	Rhetoric	2.5
Nicole	Female	29	Interpersonal/Organizational	2.5
Josh	Male	26	Rhetoric/Technology	2

Participant recruiting. Participants were recruited through the snowball sampling technique, face-to-face interactions, and through individual emails. Snowball sampling refers to the process of recruiting participants referred by people that the researcher knows or by participants already taking part in the study (Dilley, 2000).

Specifically, the snowball sampling technique was utilized to find out which GTAs had at least two years teaching experience and might be available to participate in the study. The face-to-face technique of recruitment was mostly used as a follow-up to emails and as a way to clarify interview times with participants. Individual emails were utilized most frequently to recruit participants. Email addresses were obtained from a GTA email list provided by the Communication Studies Department. I sent out an email to each individual that I thought might be an eligible GTA (at least two years teaching experience) in the Department ($N = 32$), asking if they would be willing and available to participate in the study. Follow-up emails and conversations were utilized if participants did not respond to the initial request for participation in the study. Of the 32 emails sent to potential participants, nine GTAs refused participation: four did not respond; three did not have the minimum number of years of teaching experience; one was out of town; and one was too busy studying for comprehensive exams.

Interviewing

Interviewing rationale. To obtain information on instructor-student disclosure, intensive face-to-face interviews were conducted with participants. The interview method was utilized for this study because of its ability to “generate rich and descriptive data” (Yu, 2010, p. 25). The purposes of interviewing, according to Charmaz (1991), are: gathering

information, acquiring insights into one's experience, and obtaining reflections about one's experience.

To accomplish the purposes of interviewing, a semi-structured interview protocol was followed. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) refer to semi-structured interviews as a guided conversation between researchers and participants. Utilizing a semi-structured interview method gives the researcher a framework to work from to obtain information, while allowing the researcher a degree of flexibility.

While conducting interviews, I followed Dilley's (2000) advice for interviewers pertaining to the five tasks involved in successful interviewing. Dilley suggests to: (1) listen to what the interviewee is saying; (2) compare what the person is saying to what knowledge you have on the topic; (3) make comparisons between what the participant is saying in one given response to the what has been said with the other questions asked; (4) pay attention to the time and deviate from interview protocol if necessary; and (5) offer prompt responses to participants if they need clarification or explanation. I also sought to only talk 20% of the time, while allowing the interviewee to talk 80% of the time (Dilley, 2000).

Interview procedures. Before interviews began with participants, two pilot interviews were conducted to ensure the usefulness of the interview protocol. Pilot interviews were conducted with a Ph.D. candidate from the same Communication Studies Department as the study's participants and with a recently graduated GTA from a large Midwestern university. The pilot study participants were interviewed because of their knowledge of both the field of Communication Studies and their experience as GTAs. Minor changes were made to the interview protocol after the pilot studies were completed. After

the changes were made, I then sent the updated protocol to the University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to have the changes approved.

Once the interview protocol revisions were approved by the IRB, I began interviewing the study's participants. Face-to-face interviews were conducted at several different locations, depending on the availability of the participants and the availability of space to conduct interviews. Specifically, interviews were conducted in the researcher's office, in a library, in classrooms, in coffee shops, and in a participant's home.

Each interview began with an explanation of the study's purpose, a guarantee of anonymity, and explanation of an informed consent document. Before interview questions were asked, I obtained written consent from the participants (see Appendix 3). An unsigned copy of the informed consent was given to each participant for his or her records. Next, participants were made aware that the interview would be audio recorded, and the interview began.

Interviews began with nine open-ended questions about participant demographics (see Appendix 4). After the demographic section of the study was completed, I asked participants specific questions to find answers to the following research questions:

RQ1: How do GTAs decide what kind of personal information to disclose and what to withhold from undergraduate students in the classroom?

RQ2: Why do GTAs decide to either disclose or withhold information from their undergraduate students?

RQ3: How do GTAs describe the results of instructor disclosure on educational outcomes in the classroom?

Specifically, at least 14 different questions were asked in each interview, but other questions were sometimes asked as follow-up questions and this was allowable given that the interview guide was semi-structured. Specifically, additional questions were asked to seek clarification of participant responses and as follow-up questions. Interviews averaged 31 minutes ($SD = 10.29$) of actual interview time, with the shortest interview lasting 13 minutes and longest lasting 52 minutes, for a total of 708 minutes of interview data.

Field notes were also recorded throughout interview process, both during and immediately following interviews, to help me recognize themes that could potentially be used in the data analysis process. Van Maanen (1988) describes field notes as, “shorthand reconstructions of events, observations, and conversations that took place in the field” (p. 123). Four pages of hand-written, single-spaced field notes were recorded.

Data Management

After each interview was completed, I transferred the interview audio to my personal laptop, which is password protected. Also, a signed copy of the each participant’s informed consent document was placed in a locked file cabinet in my office. After all of the interviews were completed and all of the interview audio was transferred to my computer, a transcription service (transcriptionhub.com) was utilized to transcribe the data. Each interview was uploaded individually to transcriptionhub.com. Because of the focus of this study, the transcription company was asked to only focus on the content of the interview data, and not to emphasize vocal pauses or inflections in voice. After the completion of the transcriptions, the transcripts were checked against the interview audio files to ensure their correctness. A total of 276 pages of single-spaced transcriptions were generated from the 23 interviews.

Data Analysis

A thematic approach to analyzing the data was utilized. Thematic analysis involves a “search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon” (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 3). Braun and Clark (2006, p. 6) explain the process of using a thematic analysis, stating that it is:

A method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, it also often goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic.

To analyze the interview data, I employed an inductive thematic analysis. An inductive thematic analysis was used to create themes that are drawn directly from the data and exist without the use of prior research (Boyatzis, 1998). To construct the themes from the data, I used an *open*, *axial*, and *selective* coding system (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Open coding refers to the initial stage of coding, in which units of analysis are interpreted and placed into categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Examples of open codes in my data include “relationship/family issues,” “getting to know students,” and “motivation/reasoning.” From the data, 115 open codes were produced.

Axial coding refers to the process of unifying categories based on relationships between the data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). During the axial coding stage, I began to interpret the data by looking for connections between the data. Examples of axial codes include “sharing other’s experiences,” “sex and sexual escapades,” and “one’s experience.”

Selective coding refers to the process of unifying themes around core categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Examples of selective codes include “GTAs consider topics when

self-disclosing to students,” “GTAs learn about proper self-disclosure,” and “Explaining course material.”

I interpreted units of analysis in multiple ways, such as words, sentence fragments, complete sentences, or multiple sentence responses. This approach allowed for flexibility in interpreting the responses of the participants. To help guide the data analysis process, I utilized aspects of Owen’s (1984) approach to conducting a thematic analysis. Owen (1984) states that there are three ways to identify a theme in data: recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. Recurrence refers to similar data that is observed in at least different two portions of a data set. Repetition signifies to key words, phrases, and/or sentences that show up multiple times in participant responses. Forcefulness refers to nonverbal communication such as vocal inflection, volume, or dramatic pauses. For this study, I focused predominantly on recurrence and repetition within the data.

Chapter Four: Results

This study sought to answer questions about Communication Studies graduate teaching disclosure. Research questions were asked to GTAs about three primary areas: managing one's self-disclosure, motivations for disclosing personal information, and GTA perceptions of the effects of self-disclosure on learning outcomes. This chapter summarizes the themes that arose from answers to the questions that were asked of the participants of the study. Interview data is examined by research question, and themes are discussed and illustrated by actual participant responses.

RQ1: How GTAs Make Decisions About Self-Disclosure in the Classroom

The first research question asked: How do GTAs decide what kind of personal information to disclose and what to withhold from undergraduate students in the classroom? Three overarching themes were identified in the data in regard to the ways in which GTAs make decisions about sharing personal information with undergraduate students. First, GTAs articulated that they consider the nature of the topic of their self-disclosure when considering sharing private information with students. Second, GTAs explained that they learn about a culture of appropriate self-disclosure from others and from their own experiences. Third, GTAs described balancing a tension between being a friend and an authority figure with students.

Theme 1: GTAs consider the nature of topics when self-disclosing to students.

Relational dialectics theory asserts that humans live their lives by balancing a variety of tensions, one of which is a tension between being open and closed with private information (Baxter, 1988). According to Petronio (1991), individuals set up rules to manage this tension. Communication privacy management theory posits that individuals consider two

things when establishing rules about sharing private information: the content of a disclosure and a rule management process (Petronio, 2004). This section examines how GTAs manage the openness-closedness dialectic (Baxter, 1988) by considering the topic of private information that they self-disclose or withhold from their students. Specifically, this section addresses topics that GTAs avoid sharing with students and topics that GTAs feel comfortable self-disclosing with students.

Topics that GTAs avoid sharing with students. When asked their experiences of self-disclosing to undergraduate students, most GTAs were quick to discuss the areas that they avoid talking about in the classroom. Corbin, for example, suggested that participants should think about only disclosing topics that, *“you would tell, like, in a job interview.”* Other participants spoke about the importance of avoiding certain topics to maintain professionalism. Isaac said, *“Don’t disclose too much. Don’t disclose the wrong information.”* Others spoke about specific topics to avoid. The most-often discussed topics that GTAs avoid in the classroom are religion/politics; details about their interpersonal relationships; sex, drugs, and alcohol; certain demographic information; and trivial information.

Religion/politics. Several participants supported the cliché that individuals are to avoid sharing two topics with others: religion and politics. Kimberly, for example, said that GTAs should avoid, *“politics, religion, you know, anything that might sort of offend someone or make someone not like you as much as a teacher.”* Although other participants noted that discussing religion and politics is a necessity at times, they were quick to explain that they avoid sharing personal opinions and strive for an objective discussion. Gerald, for example, shared that he avoids sharing his personal experience with religion:

I hardly ever talk about religion or personal experiences with religion, even though students will confide in me in terms of these things. I never bring that up and I never talk about that with students.

Catherine also spoke about not sharing one's views on politics or religion. She, like others, grouped the two topics together when discussing topics that she avoids sharing with students:

I don't let them know my political leanings. I don't let them know religious, like religion always makes me uncomfortable in class, politics that's pretty much about it. If I do talk about politics, I tried – I don't think I've ever talked about religion. I have talked about politics like in a speech class but then I try and be balanced...I'll use examples from both sides.

Although Josh did not group religion and politics together, he did feel similarly with Catherine that when discussing politics it's best to provide examples from both sides of the political spectrum:

Political leanings, especially with hot-button, social issues like gay marriage and abortion, I make a point to be objective. And I know there is the feeling we get, it's just such sensitive topics that I don't feel comfortable, even my own personal investment in those topics, and my own personal feelings, I kind of keep that out, especially I would say are the limited kind of hot-button social issues. I always try to give examples on both sides.

Details about interpersonal relationships. GTAs had a great deal to say about their interpersonal relationships in the classroom. Although some participants were willing to share minor details about their families or dating partners, several described not wanting

to give too many details about their close personal relationships. Emily and Dani both described a caution about discussing relationships. For example, Emily said:

I guess I stay away from like personal relationships. I think as far as my dating life or anyone that I'm involved with, sometimes they come up in examples, which I often get about halfway into the example, and I'm like, "Why am I telling this example, I don't want to start with that."

Similarly, Dani said, *"I don't think that I would share too much of my like personal relationship life with them, like I certainly never disclosed that I am in a serious relationship..."* In addition to not wanting to give general information about interpersonal relationships, other participants described avoiding shedding a negative light on others. Emmitt, for example, described regret after speaking negatively about an ex-fiancé, stating, *"After I said something like that, I [thought] 'that's probably a little bit too much. I'm not here for therapy.'"* Avoiding the defamation of others also applies to professional relationships, such as co-workers and students. Gerald shared how he would never talk negatively about co-workers, despite inquiries from students: *"I never talk about that, I never – I refuse steadfastly to give my opinion on colleagues to students."* Josh also described how he learned to be careful when making comments about students:

And sometimes I have an evaluation like, when students are absent and I also make a comment like, "Yeah, they are always gone" or something like that. And then I had an evaluation come back and say, "I hope you don't talk about me when I am absent" and I was like, "Oh, so I got to be careful with that too, like, not making comments on people..."

Sex, drugs, and alcohol. Many participants mentioned staying away from discussing their sex lives, alcohol consumption, and past drug use. When asked what topics he avoids disclosing to students, Thomas stated, *“Obviously sexual history, drug use, off the table. I’ve mentioned occasionally drinking, but I don’t think that’s – I think that’s in a different category.”* Kristin also said that GTAs should avoid topics such as *“your sex life”* and *“talking about how you got wasted.”* Wesley also mentioned staying away from his sex life, and described a fear of legal ramifications for discussing one’s sex life with students:

Also my personal and my sex life, I do not discuss in class, just because I think that’s inappropriate and it encourages them to do the same and you can very quickly get into legal issues there.

GTAs not only discussed wanting to stay away from disclosing about their sexual history, but several also mentioned not sharing their sexual orientation. Jacob, for example, stated, *“I think the thing I have never shared is sexual orientation. And the students don’t ask questions like that, and I never talk about sexual orientation in the class.”*

Certain demographic information. Participants discussed not wanting their students to know certain types of demographic information about them. Specific examples included withholding information about where one lives, one’s age, or how much money GTAs make. Each of the answers about withholding demographic information alluded to a desire to look more professional to students. Derek, for example discussed how he didn’t want his students to be able to find him on the Internet or in public: *“I don’t want them to be able to find me on Facebook or find me in town. I’ve had bad experiences where students have run into me while I’m out, drinking, having alcohol.”* Nicole described keeping her age private with her students, stating, *“But I don’t tell them how old I am, like they never ask, but I’m not*

going to just tell them how old I am or – I don't know.” Bonnie talked about a desire to withhold her income from students:

I don't necessarily like talking about like my finances or my income. I tell them that I don't make very much money, but we do talk about the economy and we talk about economics for you know 20 some things, and I try to keep that private.

Trivial information. Participants mentioned a desire to not disclose information that could be deemed trivial. Several GTAs described a desire to keep “water cooler talk” to a minimum. Emmitt encapsulated this desire well, stating, *“I think there is another category of banalities, what I had for breakfast, stuff that they don't care about.”* Beyond details about one's eating habits, Dani described a desire to withhold information about the state of her day:

I mean, I don't know, if I would necessarily disclose having a bad day per se. I think about something, you always want to try to go into the classroom positive. And so if I was upset or unhappy about something, I don't think I would disclose that to students.

Creighton described fighting the temptation to “pander” to students, by discussing sports with them in the classroom:

I guess I feel like it's not helpful to me to pander to them. In other words, be like, “Yeah I'm a huge [basketball] fan and blah...blah...blah...” even though I am. You know what I mean, but it's just – I don't think it comes across really that necessarily at least, for me personally, I could come across really fake.

Topics that GTAs feel comfortable self-disclosing with students. Participants not only had an idea of what topics to avoid in the classroom, but also were able to describe the

topics that they feel comfortable disclosing with undergraduate students. This section analyzes the personal topics that GTAs report disclosing to students. Specifically, the following topics are addressed: positive aspects of interpersonal life, professional experience, small talk, and religion/politics.

Positive aspects of interpersonal life. Although many participants discussed not wanting to share in-depth or negative information about their interpersonal relationships, several were comfortable sharing basic or positive aspects of relationships. Gerald and Dirk both described a willingness to talk about their families with students. For example, Gerald said:

Family dynamics, composition of my family, my birth order. They know I'm married because I always have a wedding band on and they will ask me about my wife and do I have kids. I mean, general family – general biographical information I would disclose to my students.

Likewise, Dirk explained:

But I am open about things about being married, getting married young. I got married two days after my 21st birthday. I have been married twelve-and-a-half years, and for a graduate student teaching that - they don't expect to hear that.

Others discussed how disclosure about personal relationships can be useful for teaching.

Emmit made the point that giving examples about his partner can be utilized as a “*teaching tool, useful and relatable...*” Catherine echoed this sentiment, stating, “*Again, especially like an interpersonal class, I talk a lot about my relationships. So, different relationships that I've had in the past, friendships, as well. Talk a lot about my family.*”

Professional experience. The most discussed subject, in regard to topics that GTAs feel comfortable sharing with students, was professional experience. Responses about professional experience can be divided into two camps: work experience and education experience.

Several GTAs mentioned the importance of telling students about their educational journey. For example, Ann talked about sharing about her time as an undergraduate student: *"I would share what I did as an undergrad in terms of classes or activities."* Kristin also mentioned sharing her educational background with students: *"I'll give them an idea of my background and what it is that I studied, primarily because I think it builds my credibility..."* Disclosing about one's education is not limited to one's background, however. Gerald, for example, talked about the importance of discussing his current educational work: *"Who I work with, who's my advisor, what classes am I taking. I talk a lot about my own work, my own experience."* Emily also mentioned the importance of sharing her research to students:

Well, I absolutely share my research, and just because I think as far as Communication goes, you have to know your audience. And if students are writing for me and speaking to me, and I'm grading them, then they should probably know a little bit more about myself.

Other participants discussed disclosing their work experience to students. Catherine talked about how her disclosure about work can be used as a teaching tool:

So, things that I've experienced in my time at work – a lot of times just trying to make the points that they will have some of these experiences or trying to relate them to things that I also know they've done.

Becca also discussed how sharing her work experience can be utilized as a pedagogical tool. Specifically, she talked about how sharing work experience can be a credibility builder:

For example, I use a lot of my own personal experiences when I'm teaching the students and sometimes things slip out. So, in the course of the classroom, students may learn that I worked as an administrative assistant in a large public high school, which of course goes to my credibility teaching...business communication.

Small talk. While some of the participants talked about staying away from trivial information, others embrace small talk in the classroom. So, while some GTAs see no need for discussing hobbies, others find it perfectly normal to discuss what one what likes to do or what one did over the weekend. While describing the topics that he feels comfortable sharing with students, Thomas said, *"I talk about things I do in my free time, kind of my nerd habits. I've talked about things [like] my favorite sports teams."* Emmitt, while, on one hand, mentioning the need to stay away from *"banalities"* such as what he had to eat, feels comfortable sharing his hobbies: *"Certainly, personal preferences like music, movies, books..."* Other participants discussed an openness to talking about what one did over the weekend or what one is going to do over a holiday, as long as it is professional. For example, Kyla shared:

Hobbies, like I mentioned. I told you, like loosely what I did over the weekend. "I studied," that's something I would share. But, I would never share something like I don't know, if I drank excessively like that's not something I would share with my students.

Religion/Politics. Like the last topic, "Small Talk," there was a diversity of opinion in regard to the topics of religion and politics. In other words, the majority of participants

mentioned that they would never talk about religion/politics, yet several others said that they would discuss the topics to a certain extent. Kimberly, for example, said, *“So yeah, I think politics will be a big one. Religion is a big one. I disclose a little about religion but not so much to make anyone feel uncomfortable...”* Both Dirk and Thomas mentioned that they felt a need to share their political opinions, so that students could get an understanding of where they were coming from. For example, Dirk said:

Then there is always the question, particularly with the things that I study of how much and to what degree do you disclose as a professor, your political leanings. And I think, the ones who are the most effective were the ones who were the most open about it. So, they know where he stands, they can interpret the comments that you make and that kind of stuff.

Similarly, Thomas said:

Certainly comfortable sharing political, social opinions, but not as a cornerstone of argument, but instead as, “Look, this is how I feel about things so you should know when I make comments, this is kind of the filter bias I apply to it.”

Bonnie discussed how her students do not always appreciate her willingness to disclose her political opinions, but that she feels that she should be open and honest with students about her political leanings if it is related to course content:

Yeah, I think if it's pertinent to the class material, like, I tell my students at the beginning of a semester one of the – and it's every semester at least one student on my qualitative evaluations will say something about my political opinion. This semester it was only one, but they will say you know, “I wish you weren't so

political.” And I almost always will tell my students, like, “I’m not going to pretend I don’t have an opinion and I’m not going to pretend I’m not political.”

Theme 2: GTAs learn about a culture of proper self-disclosure. Damen (1987) defines culture as, “learned and shared human patterns or models for living” (p. 367). This definition indicates that culture influences the way that individuals live their lives on a day-to-day basis. Implicit in the idea of culture is a realization that individuals do not inherently know how to function in daily life; instead, humans *learn* how to function. When applied to GTA self-disclosure, culture affects the way that GTAs learn to make decisions about sharing private information.

As discussed in the first theme, Petronio (2004) asserts that there are two aspects to establishing boundaries with private information: the content of private information and a rule management process. While theme one addressed the former, theme two focuses on the process that GTAs go through in establishing rules about self-disclosure. Petronio (2004) posits that individuals make decisions about establishing rules based on five things: context, gender, motivations for disclosure, risk/rewards, and culture. The factor most often discussed by participants in the current study was culture. This section addresses how GTAs learn about a culture of self-disclosure in the classroom.

All participants discussed a variety of ways that they acquire information about a culture of self-disclosure in the classroom. Embedded in their discussion of the different ways in which self-disclosure is learned are examples of learning both *what to do* and *what not to do* when self-disclosing. In other words, when considering managing their own private information in the classroom, GTAs draw from both positive and negative examples of self-disclosure. Examples of self-disclosure come from multiple places, due the fact that

GTAs have to simultaneously manage roles as both student and instructor. This section addresses how GTAs learn about a culture self-disclosure from their experience as a student and their experience as an instructor.

Learning culture from experiences as a student. GTAs discussed learning about a culture of self-disclosure from their professors, and also from Communication Studies course material. This section explains the different ways in which participants learn about disclosure from their experience as a student. Specifically, GTAs discussed how they learn about self-disclosure from communication course material and from their professors by learning proper examples of disclosure, witnessing over-disclosure, and witnessing under-disclosure.

Many participants made the point that spending several years as a Communication Studies student gives one numerous opportunities to experience self-disclosure. More specifically, GTAs made comments that the field of Communication Studies innately fosters communication in the classroom. In other words, Communication Studies professors not only teach about communication, but they demonstrate it to their students. Thomas described this phenomena, stating, *"Yeah and maybe it's because I spend most of my time in COMS departments and so people are by nature more 'sharing.'"* Emily, like many other participants described how Communication Studies fosters self-disclosure:

I mean, I think it's a maybe a departmental norm or a Communication field norm. I've taken a lot of courses through Communication departments and to see how those professors addressed us, and a lot of times that Communication course that I was going to was going to be the most interesting - I was going to have the most interesting discussion in my COMS courses.

Bonnie took Emily's description of Communication Studies courses one step further by discussing how course content can develop certain skill sets that lead to proper self-disclosure:

I'm a very, I think I'm a very self-aware person. I'm good at observing situations. I'm good at watching people, so I notice when other people, like, over-share I guess, and I'm aware of the - I'm very, I mean, just my education I guess has taught me the things that you say have a really big impact on how people perceive you and have a really big impact on your relationships with other people in the way that you phrase things and that how important it is to be aware of what you are saying.

Emily also made the point that Communication Studies classes also give professors numerous opportunities to self-disclose, saying, *"I think being in a Communication Department it's very rare that you don't know a lot about your professors."* Some participants mentioned specific professors that taught them how to do self-disclosure well, and others mentioned professors, generally speaking. Kristin spoke of the latter:

Well, I mean, I think when you start teaching you try to emulate professors or teachers that you have that you admire. And so for me, I always felt like I have the best learning outcomes, when I was really challenged and when I was pushed by a professor. So I think, yeah, my expectations on how I should behave are probably just from observing other people and what they did.

Other participants spoke about a specific professor that modeled a healthy level of self-disclosure to students, and therefore gave the GTA someone to emulate. Ann for example, discussed witnessing a professor she had during her Ph.D. program:

Yeah, I think just from what I saw, Dr. Jenkins, especially maintaining the non-emotional kind of distance, but friendly approach as the best. Yeah, it was okay. It was different because, right, I tried to kind of mirror that. If they weren't going to disclose a lot to me, I was also – I would think twice about disclosing to them.

Other GTAs described mentors that taught them about self-disclosure. Creighton, for example, talked about how much he learned from his mentor in his M.A. program:

I learned a lot from him, he is very different from me, personality-wise, he is over - opposite, he is super gregarious and outgoing and you know, hilarious in class and all that stuff. So, I don't imitate that, but in terms of just being real and being transparent, "Here is who I am," and, I think I learned a lot from him. Yeah, from modeling.

Not all participant descriptions of professor self-disclosure were positive, however. Participants spoke of professors who shared too much private information about themselves, which in turn helped shape participant views of what to disclose and what not to disclose. GTAs described a wide variety of instances in which their professors shared too much information. The most often-discussed professor over-disclosure described by participants was in the area of interpersonal relationship troubles. Derek, for example, described one of his professors discussing his sex/dating life openly with students: *"I can remember, as an undergraduate, having a professor talking about the kids he had out of wedlock."* Bonnie discussed a situation in which one of her professors spent a great deal of time talking about her ex-husband:

I was in a class with a professor who hated her ex-husband so much that was a really big focus of the class. And it was actually one of my interpersonal classes. And, yeah, it was a lot of – I mean, her research definitely fall under that “me-search” category.

Not all descriptions of professor over-disclosure were about dating and sex. Valerie talked about a professor discussing one of her peers in a graduate seminar in a manner that she felt was unprofessional:

I was in class recently where a professor began talking about someone else’s, like, one of the graduate students, like, defenses and there was a lot - kind of big, but not so big that we couldn’t figure out who it was.

Others spoke of professors who would display their feelings/emotions in a way that made the class uncomfortable. Similar to Bonnie’s description of her professor who completed “me-search,” Jacob talked about one of his professors who made a habit of venting to students about the stress in her life: *“The instructor was talking about I guess some work related stress or something, and the instructor just started crying in front of us and just stopped.”*

Participants also discussed how professor under-disclosure shaped their views on self-disclosure. GTAs shared specific examples of professors who would not share private information with students and then discussed their opinions on how a lack of self-disclosure affected the classroom environment. Emmit described how one of his M.A. professor’s under-disclosure affected his relationship with her:

Yeah, the professor who taught, she was teaching the basic course class [in my master’s program]. I don’t know what she was like out of the classroom and I didn’t have a lot of contact with her out of the classroom, but she was just business. When

you start talking to somebody, you've got to say something about yourself, but [she] did not share anything else about herself. It didn't make her a worst teacher. I didn't feel any sense of collegiality, if that's the word, or any kind of bond with her.

Hallie also discussed how one of her professors was “*really reserved*” and would not share any personal information with his students, and that, because of his privacy, “*everyone was always so intimidated by him.*”

Other participants talked about professor's not sharing personal work experience, which GTAs found to hinder student learning. Corbin explained how one of his pedagogy professors would not talk about her teaching experience:

I always felt like Dr. King was a little like that; she is very guarded. In a class where, it's a teaching class, I think, sharing experience is really good. Like, “Hey, I've been there before, I've done this.”

Kristin also talked about how some professors do not share any information about their work experience outside of academia, which can create problems in the classroom:

Well, I think academics is interesting because so often professors don't have any experience outside of teaching, and so there is not really anything for them to share. And so, you know, you go into a class and it's like they teach that class because they got assigned to that class, maybe it's a research interest, but it always seems weird to me that they don't have outside professional experience in the subject, and that I think that can create a disconnect.

Learning culture from experiences as an instructor. As discussed in the previous section, communication classes are rife with opportunities for self-disclosure. Therefore, it makes sense that participants spoke a great deal about their students' self-disclosure and

their own experiences of self-disclosure as an instructor. This section addresses how GTAs learn from their own mistakes when self-disclosing and also from their students' mistakes.

Some participants described a process of “*trial and error*” in learning how to manage their private information. Participants were willing to admit that they had made mistakes in self-disclosing, both inside and outside of the classroom. For example, Valerie, among other participants, talked about making mistakes early in their GTA careers:

It's really trial and error, I think, my first semester, I don't know if it just with me, I don't know, I mean, I was still pretty young, but I had students like asking like, putting their numbers on exams or any stuff and I don't know if that was something I did. Like I don't feel like my personality has radically changed, but, yeah, I'd really just think trial and error. Yeah, just, I mean, still like I'm going to make mistakes...

Kristin, like Valerie, mentioned learning about proper self-disclosure from mistakes early in her teaching career. Specifically, she mentioned learning from sharing information to her students about her social life:

I think when I first started teaching I was more concerned with being their friend. And I don't think there's ever been an occasion where I thought well I probably shouldn't have said that, but I think in retrospect, I probably said things that I...wouldn't say now. Being like, "Oh, it's my birthday, I'm going to go out tonight" or whatever, like, probably not relevant information that they need to know.

Instead of discussing his mistakes in the classroom, Derek mentioned making self-disclosure mistakes and learning from them in other aspects of his life:

The other is trial and error. I know, I'm yeah, I guess you can say the part of that trial here comes from stuff outside of the classroom, like I know I don't want to talk

about my past [mistakes] with anyone I want to have respect me. But, yeah, trial and error.

Thomas also described a trial and error process by describing how he varies his disclosure based on the students in his classes and the time of the day that the class meets:

So past experience definitely matters; I hope it is definitely an audience-based thing.

I think that there are some classes that I am generally just closer with because of the nature of the people in the room and we are willing to talk to them about things.

You know, I don't know if it's an effective the time, but I've had two 8:00 AM classes... where I probably said the least about my self, but my afternoon, mid-morning classes I tend to be fairly open.

When discussing witnessing their professors' self-disclosure, participants spoke of both positive and negative examples of self-disclosure in the classroom; this was not the case when discussing students' self-disclosure. GTAs only spoke of over-disclosure when talking about students. So, by witnessing students share too much information about themselves, GTAs were better able to understand what *not* to do when self-disclosing.

While many GTAs were quick to mention that they would never want to discuss their own relationship issues with students, it is clear that not all undergraduate students feel the same way about disclosing negative aspects of their interpersonal lives in the classroom. Derek described a recent example of a student over-sharing about his family: *"For example, this week I had students disclose about some pretty serious family abuse situations."* Other GTAs talked about how their students would often discuss their dating life in inappropriate ways in the classroom. Hallie described such a situation:

I had another student who would always catch me after class, asking me about what should she do with her relationship, because it sounds like she was in kind of – didn't seem like an abusive relationship, but her boyfriend was like way overprotective like wanting to have her to be a captive woman, just crazy stuff like that.

Thomas also described a situation where one of his students not only talked about his family in an inappropriate way, but went on to admit his drug use to him:

I had a student called me on to the hall and tell me, he needed to talk to me about few things and proceeded to tell me about his alcoholic mother and grandmother, who'd gotten him on marijuana, and the problems that he was having balancing the chaos that was in their lives and then smoking all the time.

According to the participants, student's talking about drug use is not the only type of dirty laundry that students are willing to disclose in the classroom. Kimberly said that, "one guy told me that he was a felon and I was quite surprised." Derek described how students in Communication Studies classes will often be quite open in admitting their mistakes in front of peers and their instructor:

I think that a lot of that is in the form of introductory speaking. People are used to giving a certain kind of "Come to Jesus" story. I don't know what the correct term is, but... they tell the story - their salvation from drugs or from sexual abuse. I do see that a lot.

Unfortunately, not all self-disclosures described were about a redemption story. Kristin described a horrifying situation in which one of her students started a classroom discussion about suicide by admitting trying to take her own life:

Yeah, one student talked about trying to commit suicide a couple weeks earlier. That was heavy. And then one person started talking about the friend that has committed suicide.

In all of the examples of student self-disclosure discussed by participants, GTAs shared about learning about what to avoid when self-disclosing.

Theme 3: GTAs strike a balance between being a friend and authority figure.

Hennings (2009) posits that GTAs are placed in a difficult position of being both a person of authority (an instructor) and person without authority (a student). Functioning in both roles causes GTAs to feel a dialectical tension where feel like they have earned students' respect, while at the same time feel like they have connected with students on a personal level (Hennings, 2009).

A large number of participants in this study affirmed Hennings' (2009) research. Creighton, for example, said, *"Obviously, there is that dialectic between maintaining a professional distance and connecting with your students."* Kyla described the difficulty of being GTA, in regard to the *"in-between"* position that GTAs function in:

[Being a GTA] makes it different because I think sometimes [students] see you as sort of, like, this in-between, like you are their instructor, you are their teacher but at the same time like you might share the same professor.

When deciding what information to share to undergraduate students, several participants alluded to the reality that sharing certain topics would make one more of a *"friend"* to students, while sharing other topics would make one more of an *"authority."* Nicole, for example, discussed the difficulty of balancing this tension with students:

Sometimes you blow that boundary of student and professor. And so I think to keep that professionalism, you want to have some sense of "I'm the instructor here," and I think that's more important for the TA relationship.

Participants not only spoke in generalities about the difficulty of balancing the friendship-authority dialectic, but they mentioned specific reasons why it is difficult to manage both friendship and authority in the classroom. Specifically, GTAs mentioned that how a lack of job security and a lack of power distance makes managing the friendship-authority tension difficult.

Participants often spoke about a perception of a lack of job security for GTAs. Specifically, participants felt that being a professor gives one a great deal more job security than being a GTA. When discussing self-disclosure as a future professor, Emmitt said, *"I'd imagine that the additional job security would let you be a little freer with [self-disclosure]."* Bonnie also spoke about the concern for her job security as a GTA:

You know, I think it will be different when I am a professor, because at the same time there is more on – there is maybe not as much on the line, because like this could, you know, if the wrong kind of information got out, it could prevent me from getting my degree in the first place.

Others spoke of the perceived support that departments give to professors when dealing with student issues. Corbin spoke about the *"backing"* that professors receive:

I think any professor, even if you're not tenured, has a whole heck of a lot of more backing from a department and from a college than a GTA does, if a student starts to challenge grade.

Isaac also spoke about the consequences of dealing with student issues, by addressing the constraints that student ratings can place on a GTA:

I don't have as much power as a professor, so that relates not to my personal disclosure or of the information, more of just the confidence that I have and saying what I think. I might, I think some students need to be told off a little bit...when in a blue moon that's necessary. I don't feel I'm in the position to do that yet, because our ratings are such a big deal in the early stage.

Just as Isaac described his lack of “power” as a GTA, many other participants echoed his sentiment that GTAs do not possess as much power as professors, or more specifically don't possess as much of a power distance. Gerald described the difference in power distance between GTAs and professors:

The power distance between myself and the students as a GTA, is smaller than the power distance between myself as a professor... And I mean, structurally those relationships are dissimilar in terms of power distance.

Both Dani and Derek talked about how the titles of “professor” or “doctor” give the professor more power than a GTA. Derek said, “The title doctor or professor seems to have a lot of that built-in in a way that my students refer to me by my first name and that there is no built-in distance there.” Dani described how being a GTA makes her disclose less:

I think that makes me disclose less certainly, because I feel like as a GTA and not a professor that I have to push more to get respect from students, to an extent. It's not that I think they disrespect me from the start by any means, but more a question of just saying I know that I don't have, I can't call myself a professor.

Kimberly also spoke about the lack of GTA power distance, in regard to being “*professional*” or “*in-charge*” of the classroom. She, like others, shared the feeling that professors do indeed have more power than GTAs:

I do think GTAs have to struggle a little more than professors do, sometimes at being viewed professional or in-charge, or you know, the boss of the classroom, whereas a professor, I don't think necessarily ever really has to struggle with that.

Based on the perception that GTAs function in a friendship-authority tension, GTAs have to learn to balance the dialectic to effectively do their job. Therefore, the following two sections address the ways that GTAs use self-disclosure to balance the dialectic of being a friend and being an authority figure.

Being a friend to students. Although GTAs often discussed the difficulties that can arise when establishing boundaries with students, participants also articulated a positive connection between self-disclosure and building interpersonal relationships with students. Many GTAs were quick to speak of the benefits of self-disclosure on building relationships with undergraduate students. Catherine succinctly stated the importance of self-disclosure for relationship building with students:

You need to do it to build connections with your students. You need to do it to build affinity. I feel like if you're not disclosing with the classroom, the environment isn't going to be as productive or as beneficial as it could be if you are but to also make sure that you are not putting yourself on their level.

Kimberly spoke about how self-disclosure can build rapport with students, saying, “*I think disclosing is really important to get that rapport going for sure...*” Participants not only spoke in vague terms about the importance of being a friend to students, but also about

specific ways that one can build a healthy interpersonal relationship with students. Specifically, GTAs spoke about keeping friendships with students at a distance, being oneself, and using age to connect with students.

While GTAs spoke of the benefits of building relationships with students, they were quick to speak about how GTAs must not go *too far* in building interpersonal relationships with undergraduate students. In describing the tension that GTAs face between being a friend and an authority figure, Thomas gave the following advice on how to keep relationships with students at a safe distance:

Keep some things off the table. I mean, I just think at times you have to appear, unwilling to disclose things that you're otherwise willing to disclose, just to make it seem like there is a barrier that exists between you and the students. Just to remind them that at the end of the day, this is still a professional relationship.

Other participants spoke of building relationships, but maintaining a safe distance. Kristin, for example, said that GTAs should “*help your students to trust you and feel comfortable,*” but at the same time to “*maintain professional decorum at all points in time.*” Nicole said that a GTA can find a good balance by setting clear boundaries:

I would say let the students know that you're a real person. Share what you're comfortable sharing, but make sure that you have some kind of boundaries of building that professional image of yourself, and making sure it's clear that I'm the instructor, you're the student, you need to have some kind of boundaries here.

Other participants spoke about the need to be oneself to properly build relationships with students. Participants essentially said that if one is comfortable sharing certain things, then share; if one is not comfortable sharing, then don't. Bonnie articulated

this mindset, stating, “*Only do it if you are comfortable and only do it if you know what you are doing.*” Both Corbin and Dani talked about how self-disclosure can be beneficial to the classroom, if you’re comfortable sharing. For example, Corbin noted:

If you don’t feel comfortable self-disclosing, don’t do it. I mean, if you are someone who is more guarded and you would rather just teach the material, and that you’d use other examples from other people or from more public sort of things, go ahead and do it. That’s fine, like for me, it’s just kind of your comfort level or where you feel with it.

Similarly, Dani said:

Be comfortable with it. So don’t try to disclose a whole lot just because you think that that’s going to help you. If you’re going to only disclose as much as you’re comfortable disclosing, never think that, “Oh, well, X study says that, when I disclose more that it makes me do better.” Do what’s good for you, but at the same time recognize the value in disclosure and so far as it can really help the students.

GTAs discussed both positives and negatives of being relatively close to the age of undergraduate students. Some participants, however, spoke about specific ways that being younger can aid GTAs in building relationships with students. Thomas was one of the participants who described the benefits of GTAs generally being younger than professors. He spoke about what it means to a younger person teaching undergraduate students:

Not only because you have similar cultural and social icons and markers, I can make a “Saved by the Bell” joke with my class and they know what I am talking about, but because I think it’s more comfortable for them to act like themselves around me. My students tend to [joke around] a lot of my classrooms, and I don’t know if it’s

because I [joke around] a lot of my classrooms, or if it's because I'm 26, and I wear jeans and a button neck shirt.

Jacob, who is 30 years old, articulated the advantages of being a relatively close to the age of his students:

It has advantages and disadvantages. Advantages, well one thing well, being a GTA you are not much older than your students. So self-disclosure kind of relates your life to theirs, which can be create intimacy and then they will talk more in class and that will help them to build their public speaking skills. So if your self-disclosure is about your favorite movies, your favorite TV shows, your favorite music, those will help.

Jacob, however, also discussed the disadvantages of being young. He shared the opinion of many other participants, stating, *“And being a GTA versus professor, the disadvantage would be to maintain the distance between you and the students.”*

Being an authority figure to students. While GTAs believe that being a friend to students can be beneficial to the learning process, participants also described a constant struggle of maintaining a sense of authority with undergraduate students. GTAs spoke about the ways that they use self-disclosure to creating a sense of authority with students: maintaining professionalism, drawing from work experience, and strategic disclosure.

In order to maintain a level of authority with students, participants talked about the importance of remembering your role as an educator. Wesley provided a warning about self-disclosing anything that would cause students to think of GTAs as anything other than an educator:

I would say you don't want to disclose anything to a student that would, depending on their level of maturity, cause them to think of you predominantly as anything else, but an educator. So I will put it into another context, and I think maybe that's a good general rule that you keep the educational context to education.

Josh also articulated the importance of conducting oneself professionally as an educator:

I would say, don't forget that you are – you know, people are paying big money for you to be here to teach. These students and their parents probably are paying a lot of money to have you teach them, that you should take this seriously and shouldn't – you should approach, you should be living up to the highest standards of conduct that you can have, and so I would say, you shouldn't reveal much about yourself.

In addition to having at least two years of teaching experience, participants brought a wide array of work experiences to the classroom (see Table 2). Several participants mentioned that their work experience outside of the classroom helped them understand how to properly disclose in the classroom. Wesley, when asked about how he learned about proper self-disclosure, spoke about how his experience as a journalist helped shape his self-disclosure practices:

Well, for 13 years I worked as a journalist, and in that line of work you learn very quickly, because sometimes you're writing stories about these issues. But you learn quite quickly and saliently I suppose. You learn the importance of compartmentalizing certain aspects of your life and I think that simply carried over to my teaching...

Catherine also talked about learning how to manage her self-disclosure by working in corporate America. Specifically, she talked about how her work experience helped her learn how to establish boundaries in the workplace:

I think a lot of that comes from working and having not – I mean having had professional roles [in corporate America], where you make that switch from...I was working with all of these people as a cashier, with all of these people, and now I'm their supervisor. You kind of learn how to hit those boundaries with that kind of position of technical authority outside of the classroom. When you kind of know coming into the classroom that I have to build that connection. I have to be friendly, but at the same time there has to be a distance between us because you can't think that I'm your best friend. Because eventually, I have to evaluate you...

To maintain a sense of authority in the classroom, many participants have a plan in mind before they disclose. Several GTAs talked about how planning one's self-disclosure can help GTAs avoid over-disclosure. Catherine described this mindset, giving other GTAs the following advice:

To think about it before you get in there. To be focused on your classes and notes. That you can imagine the different scenarios that you might disclose, because I think when people get into trouble is when they just start talking off the top of their head.

Emmit also described how GTAs need to think about how they are using their self-disclosure strategically, to either build rapport or build credibility:

You will have different resources that they can use to both rapport build and credibility build. And you can use disclosure for one of those two. You cannot disclose to build credibility or you can't disclose to build rapport. So, if you have

Table 2

Participant Work Experience

Pseudonym	Non-GTA Work Experience
Gerald	College Admissions
Emmit	Various “Blue-Collar” Jobs; Debate Coach
Corbin	Television Intern
Catherine	Human Resources
Kristin	Politics
Thomas	Debate Coach
Hallie	Journalism
Derek	Retail
Wesley	Journalism; Photography
Emily	Academic Staff
Dani	Food Services
Nicole	College Career Services
Josh	File Clerk
Ann	Food Services; Tutoring
Isaac	Camp Counselor
Kyla	Office Assistant
Kimberly	Human Resources
Bonnie	Childhood Education
Dirk	Assistant Professor; Food Services
Creighton	Non-profit; Assistant Professor
Becca	Secondary Education
Jacob	Research Assistant
Valerie	Food Services; Research Assistant

some other way to authority build, you should use disclosure for rapport building. If you have some other way of rapport building, you'd use the lack of disclosure for credibility building.

Gerald echoed the thoughts of Emmit, explaining how GTAs should consider the end goal of their self-disclosure:

I would emphasize the importance of remembering that the pedagogical interaction and pedagogical relationships are performances and are acts, communicative acts. And that the maintenance in the health of that relationship is the single most important aspect of a pedagogical relationship. Therefore, one must choose the level of self-disclosure that they do in accordance to the needs of that relationship.

Other participants talked about allowing their self-disclosure to build over the course of a semester, because, as Derek said, “it’s a whole lot easier to disclose later. So, you can start out disclosing very little and you can always disclose more as time goes on.”

Thomas also shared Derek’s opinion, saying:

Number one, start small, demographic information, maybe relationship status stuff like that just to see how people respond to your personal information. So start small, only include those things, second, only include those things you see relevant. So I understand the tendency once you become comfortable with your class to tell them things like what you did over the weekend, and there is a time and place for that.

Instructors in public speaking classes inevitably will discuss the importance of analyzing one’s audience and the importance of considering the rhetorical situation when speaking in public. Based on participant responses, it is clear that GTAs practice what they preach when it comes to analyzing their audience and situation, in order to strategically

self-disclose. Creighton provided great detail in describing a number of situational factors that GTAs should consider when thinking about self-disclosing:

You have some kind of equation; you have got your age, your gender, your personality type. What kind of a classroom do you think you want to have? You know, what sort of teaching do you have? You know, are you a really loose, kind of, “come in, wing it” kind of a person? I mean, all of those things together and then, and the goals of your class, that subject of your class, I mean all of those things are going to be relevant.

Creighton went on to talk more about the importance of considering the context of the classroom when managing a friendship-authority dialectic with students:

So, and I think that depends on male, female. That depends on how old you are. That depends on the kind of personality you have, etcetera. So, being a male, being older I can probably afford to be more personal. More so in fact, I probably need to be work harder to open myself to connect with my students more and I don't have to worry so much about maintaining professional distance, because I'm an old white guy you know, what I mean. Whereas you have got, I think we got you know 22-year-old female students teaching in our department and it's like they really need to work on keeping that distance more I think.

Summary. The first research question asked how GTAs decide what kind of personal information to withhold and disclose to undergraduate students in the classroom. An analysis of the data yielded three overarching themes in response to RQ1 (see Table 3). First, GTAs articulated that they consider the nature of the topic of their self-disclosure when considering sharing private information with students (Theme 1). Second, GTAs

explained that they learn about a culture of self-disclosure from others and from their own experiences (Theme 2). Third, GTAs described managing a tension between being a friend and authority figure with students (Theme 3).

Table 3

How GTAs make Decisions About Self-Disclosure in the Classroom

Theme	Examples
1. GTAs Consider the Nature of Topics When Self-Disclosing to Students.	- <i>I don't let them know my political leanings.</i> - <i>Well, I absolutely share my research...</i>
2. GTAs Learn About a Culture of Proper Self-Disclosure.	- <i>I think when you start teaching you try to emulate professors or teachers that you have that you admire.</i> - <i>I think when I first started teaching I was more concerned with being their friend.</i>
3. GTAs Strike a Balance Between being a Friend and Authority Figure	- <i>Obviously, there is that dialectic between maintaining a professional distance and connecting with your students.</i> - <i>You need to do it [self-disclose] to build connections with your students.</i>

RQ2: GTA's Motivation For Disclosing Information

The second research question asked: Why do GTAs decide to either disclose or withhold information from their undergraduate students? Participant responses were similar to the two reasons for instructor self-disclosure mentioned in the McBride and Wahl (2005) study: to extend course content and to connect on an interpersonal level in order to relate to students. Six different themes were identified in the current study with regard to GTA motivations for sharing personal information with undergraduate students.

GTAs said that they self-disclose to undergraduate students for the following reasons: interpersonal motivators (Theme 1), to build credibility (Theme 2), to create an environment of reciprocity (Theme 3), to explain course material (Theme 4), to keep students' attention (Theme 5), and to obtain higher student evaluations (Theme 6).

Theme 1: Interpersonal motivators. Often, GTAs self-disclose to build relationships with students. Participants described several different aspects of interpersonal relationship formation and maintenance: rapport, relatability, familiarity, intimacy, and others. Responses in this category fell into two camps: relationship building to connect with students and relationship building to feel liked by your students. In the former category, Kristin described how self-disclosure helps her to seem more human to her students:

I think you know in all circumstances that disclosure can create a level of intimacy or familiarity if that's less of a, I don't know, it sounds less salacious. And yeah, so I think any relationship requires self-disclosure to move forward. So yeah, I mean, you build up on that by disclosing to your students; I think it can humanize you.

Nicole gave a similar response to Kristin and described the humanizing process as rapport:

I think you want to make that kind of connection and you want to be able to – no one seems to like you and you want them to make it a little bit more fun, see you as a real person, other than just someone standing up there lecturing at them all day, so I think you can help to build more of a connection with them. Perhaps a rapport.

Others, such as Kyla and Bonnie, fell into the latter category of admitting that many GTAs want to be liked by their students. Bonnie shared that GTAs want to be humanized, but also described wanting to be liked:

Relatability, I mean usually it has to do with you want your – you want to be humanized, because I think that a lot of us feel maybe dehumanized in some of our roles. And I think that to have a positive relationship and to be well liked by your students is something that a lot of GTAs really like and a lot of GTAs really want.

Kyla said that she wants to be liked by her students, and she also made the claim that all GTAs want to be liked:

I do think likeability is one of them, I think whoever says like, “I don’t care what my students think of me,” I kind of think that is bullshit. I think that people, to a certain extent, do always care. I mean why else would you be doing this, I don’t know.

Hallie supported Kyla’s claim, by discussing how she enjoys bantering with students in the classroom:

I feel maybe I am probably more youthful with these people in my classroom, just because there are people who are older than me here. I don’t mind being the kid of the group sometimes. And so I am okay with being silly and hearing jokes and laughing at jokes or talking about little odd things in your life or good places to eat...

Theme 2: Building credibility. Other participants mentioned that sharing information about yourself and your past experiences can build your credibility with your students. Kristin described how self-disclosure can lead to both credibility and respect from with your students, if you know what you are talking about:

I think I do it, because I think it builds my credibility, and I want to make sure that they respect me as the authority figure, and I think it’s hard to respect someone if you don’t think they know what they are talking about.

Catherine also discussed how credibility can affect GTA credibility, which, in-turn, can affect both student learning and instructor-student relationships:

I think the relationships with students are, if you are not disclosing, they're not going to be I feel as, to focus on your class, pay attention and have a desire to learn the material that you're talking about. So, if you are open with them, letting them understand your life and how what you're teaching has affected your life to bring credibility, because they believe what you're talking about, because you've taught about this in relation to who you are. And I think they – you also get not just credibility about the topic, but credibility as another human being, because they now believe that you care about them, you care about them learning this material that you really feel that this is applicable to their lives and you want to share it with them.

Others discussed how GTAs need to keep the trust of their students to do their job well.

Emmit mentioned that he withholds certain information in the classroom to maintain the respect of his students:

I'm probably more willing to – more willing to disclose in social settings, or meeting people at parties or bars or wherever else I meet people. Just because I don't have to – they don't have to respect me for me to be able to do my job, whereas students do.

Ann discussed maintaining a level of credibility with students by sharing private information with her students so that she doesn't come across in an odd way to them:

I'm very much an extrovert, sharer, yeah. I will – I feel like I give them enough information, so it doesn't look like I'm being spooky or cagy or anything, but I try to

stay away from specifics, like I said anything that I regard as personal, spouse, romantic attachment, sexual orientation, medical history, that's off the table, or drug history or alcohol.

Theme 3: Creating an environment of reciprocity. Many participants shared that they want to create an atmosphere in their classrooms where students feel comfortable talking about themselves. To create this type of environment, participants said that they would self-disclose, so that students would feel comfortable reciprocating. Emmit described the element of reciprocity as an issue of fairness:

So, and at the same time, there is an element of reciprocity involved. I ask them to tell me things about themselves, for a number of reasons. I don't think it would be fair and I don't think they are comfortable doing so if I don't offer them something – something in return.

Derek illustrated the point that Communication Studies classes often require a great deal of discussion, and subsequent self-disclosure. So, he said that when he shares private information, he is, *“trying to create an atmosphere that is comfortable enough for people to speak, because generally speaking my classes are classes which require discussion or public speaking.”* Kyla also described creating an environment of reciprocity, but she extended the discussion to include making students comfortable enough to ask questions and bring concerns to her:

So, other reasons to disclose, I think it can help foster an environment where students feel like they can approach me and talk to me, like maybe that doesn't always translate, but maybe asking them about their weekends or about their night or about how their day is going is a way for, for me to send a message that if you have questions

or concerns you can approach me, because I think we always say that, but if you don't come across as approachable, if you come across as intimidating, they are not going to do it.

Theme 4: Explaining course material. Participants often mentioned that GTAs self-disclose to illustrate or better explain course material. Ann explained the pedagogical use for self disclosing, saying, *"Maybe they want to use it pedagogically, a story, an example; 'Here's my experience.'"* Corbin further explained the pedagogical motivator for self-disclosure, by describing how self-disclosure can clarify course content:

So, I mean, my reasoning behind disclosing is usually to make, to make some kind of point, right. So, it's usually to make some sort of abstract concept that I'm teaching seem much more clear to them.

Becca also said that she self-discloses to give students real-life examples: *"If I share, and it's in context to an example for the class...they will have a real life example to look back on..."*

Becca further explained how illustrating course material causes her to self-disclose more, saying, *"When I am disclosing it's, 'Will this illustrate my point? Will this explain to students...?'"*

Others talked about how being an instructor dictates sharing more information about oneself. Creighton, for example, talked about how he doesn't like being the center of attention typically, but the classroom makes him do so:

I will [self-disclose] to my close friends definitely, probably not with people I don't know real well. Yeah, I would say I would disclose more in the classroom, partly because it is my classroom. And also because I do a lot more talking, I'm just you know, if I'm in a group of people I'm not going to be the center of attention, but when

you are teaching a class, your life is kind of on display and that's relevant to what you are talking about...

Theme 5: Keeping students' attention. GTAs talked a great deal about the need to keep students' attention in the classroom and how self-disclosure can be used to meet this need. Participants articulated the need to “*entertain*” students to keep their attention and shared different ways in which self-disclosure can assist in that. Whether GTAs felt that entertaining students is generally a positive or negative thing was not discussed, but GTAs did seem to feel that it is a necessary evil. Valerie explained the importance of keeping students engaged in the course:

I know my biggest reason for disclosing is to make them laugh. I mean, one of the hardest things about teaching is that they are just so disengaged at times and so uninterested that, you know, you just can't sit there and talk about the material all day.

Wesley shared similar sentiments to Valerie and explained how personal narrative can engage students:

Well, one that immediately comes to mind is, and I think this is the most tempting one, is simply entertainment, to keep the students attention. Yeah, the entertainment, certainly, especially if you use a lot of narrative, it's simply, the teaching of a particular lesson.

Corbin described the battle that GTAs face in keeping students' attention, and proposed that “*edutainment*” is an effective way to keep to students involved:

I mean you're trying to not only think of examples, but you're trying to seem cool and fun to your students, like, and you're thinking about “edutainment.” I mean, half

of its to entertain them so that they stay connected and stay engaged in what you're talking about.

Valerie said she is a person that “*doesn't really hold back a lot*” when it comes to self-disclosure, generally speaking, but that she focuses her self-disclosure in the classroom by telling stories that are “*more appropriate, that will make them laugh.*”

Theme 6: Student evaluations. As discussed in the section about the perceived lack of job security for GTAs, participants feel a pressure to perform well to both keep their job as a GTA and to obtain a job as a tenure-track professor. From the participant data, it is obvious that many GTAs are very cognizant of the need to do well on student evaluations at the end of each semester. Kyla discussed other motivators for self-disclosure, but also admitted that, “*sometimes I do think about evals.*” Isaac also talked about how is not as comfortable being brutally honest with students, because of a fear of negative student evaluations. Creighton didn't necessarily talk about avoiding negative evaluations, but described how self-disclosure and building relationships with students can help facilitate positive student evaluations:

Evaluations, I'd say. Yeah, I mean there is a strong motivation there to pump those up, you know, if you can, again, create that connection with them. And so, I mean, you know, that's not entirely bad; I mean that's - we all need to do that. I suppose evaluations are probably a part of it, but I hope that's not my main motivation.

Summary. Six different themes were identified in the data in regard to GTA motivations for sharing personal information with undergraduate students (see Table 4). GTAs expressed that they self-disclose to undergraduate students to: create interpersonal

relationships, build credibility, create an environment of reciprocity, explain course material, keep students' attention, and obtain positive student evaluations.

Table 4

GTA's Motivations For Disclosing Information

Themes	Examples
1. Interpersonal Motivators	- <i>I think you want to make that kind of connection...</i> - <i>Relatability...you want to be humanized...</i>
2. Building Credibility	- <i>I think I do it, because I think it builds my credibility.</i> - <i>I feel like I give them enough information, so it doesn't look like I'm being spooky...</i>
3. Creating an Environment of Reciprocity	- <i>There is an element of reciprocity involved...</i> - <i>It can help foster an environment where students feel like they can approach me</i>
4. Explaining Course Material	- <i>To make some kind of point...</i> - <i>If I share, and it's in context to an example for the class...</i>
5. Keeping Students' Attention	- <i>I mean, half of its to entertain them so that they stay connected...</i> - <i>To keep the students attention.</i>
6. Student Evaluations	- <i>Sometimes I do think about evals.</i> - <i>Evaluations, I'd say. Yeah, I mean there is a strong motivation there to pump those up...</i>

RQ3: Ways in Which GTAs Believe that Disclosure Affects Student Learning

The third research question asked: How do GTAs describe the results of instructor disclosure on educational outcomes in the classroom? When asked about the effects of self-

disclosure on learning, participant responses showed that GTAs overwhelmingly believe that self-disclosure is a positive behavior that enhances student learning. Participant responses supported past research that self-disclosure in the classroom is linked to positive learning outcomes (Cayanus & Martin, 2008; Down et al., 1988; Sorensen, 1989).

Only a few participants mentioned that self-disclosure can have negative effects on their classroom, however. For example, Bonnie mentioned, *“I think [self-disclosure] affects [the classroom] negatively, because then I think [students] think it's okay to use anecdotal personal evidence in your speeches.”* Valerie also mentioned that, at times, self-disclosure can make students too comfortable with her, which causes them to be *“too sarcastic”* in their interactions with her. Apart from the aforementioned examples, though, participants described positive outcomes associated with self-disclosure in the classroom.

Four different themes were identified in the data in regard to the ways in which GTAs perceive that self-disclosure affects student learning. This section addresses four themes about the positive effects of self-disclosure on the classroom: creating an atmosphere of approachability and comfort (Theme 1), motivation to work harder (Theme 2), demonstrating course material (Theme 3), and remembering course material (Theme 4).

Theme 1: Creating an atmosphere of approachability and comfort. When asked about their motivations for self-disclosing to students, many participants talked about creating a comfortable atmosphere in which students feel comfortable speaking and participating in class discussions. The data revealed that participants not only see comfort and approachability as a motivator, but they also see them as outcomes of self-disclosure.

Emily described how self-disclosure with her students can make them feel comfortable enough to approach her with requests for work-related help:

So I think the level of self-disclosure...lets them know that I'm an open person and I'm willing to chat with them about anything that's going on in. I really enjoy the students that come up and ask about, "Hey, I've got this job interview, could you help me with this, and stuff."

Dani also felt that her self-disclosure can make her approachable enough for students to ask questions about their struggles as students:

Well, I think, like I said before, one of the most important things in my mind is being able to get the students trust that they can talk to you about things when they're struggling. And a student doesn't want to come to a teacher that seems cold or uninterested or unhelpful in some capacity. And so I think that it's important to connect to them.

Bonnie also spoke about approachability in her response to the question about how self-disclosure affects the classroom environment. Instead of speaking about work or school related issues, Bonnie discussed how her self-disclosure makes her a better instructor, because her students feel comfortable enough to approach her with interpersonal problems:

Sometimes I also think it's beneficial for their learning, because like the woman who is going into the child custody issue, her ability to come and talk to me about that and to actually explain what was going on and why she was running out of the classroom everyday and why she was so emotional, helped me work with her better

on a one-one-one basis to help her learning – help to make sure she was still learning in that classroom.

Theme 2: Motivation to work harder. Participants also voiced an opinion that self-disclosure can help their students work harder. More specifically, participants spoke about how self-disclosure can improve students' motivation to be engaged and work harder. Kristin spoke about how self-disclosure can improve student performance and work ethic:

I think if your students like you, they probably perform better. Presuming that you still uphold expectation. Some people are so nice and give all A's and that probably doesn't lead to any higher outcomes. But I'd like to think that like you would work hard for someone that you liked versus someone that you've hated.

Hallie also spoke about how self-disclosure can lead to improved relationships with students. She shared that improved relationships can lead to higher quality work, because students do not want to be embarrassed with the quality of their work:

I think that if someone likes you more, they are more likely to listen to you and more likely to do the work because they would feel embarrassed if you didn't do it because I felt that with my teachers. If I like somebody, I feel embarrassed turning in poor work.

Kyla spoke about the foundational importance of self-disclosure, by describing the ways in which it increases students' willingness to engage course material:

Maybe it like, lays the groundwork for them being willing to learn, willing to engage, willing to listen, willing to take notes, willing to try harder. In that, maybe disclosure functions as a tool for learning.

Theme 3: Demonstrating course material. Numerous participants spoke about how self-disclosure helps them demonstrate course material to their undergraduate students. Although participant responses centered on the theme of demonstrating course material, answers differed in the way in which material was demonstrated. Emmitt, for example, spoke about how self-disclosure can demonstrate course material by literally modeling course content to students:

The first I think in terms of communication pedagogy. One of the biggest barriers to overcome is speaking anxiety. And one of the easiest things to talk about is yourself. So, when I, again, engage in that reciprocal process, part of my self-disclosure is modeling.

As discussed in the theme about GTA motivations, many participants believe that self-disclosure can enhance one's explanation of course material. Both Catherine and Kyla spoke about how sharing examples from their lives can help explicate course content. Catherine spoke of this process, when teaching relational communication:

So, in interpersonal, or family, kind of relational communication classes [self-disclosure] provides really good examples, let's them understand how they can use the material that they are learning to better their relationships. How they can use them to understand? What's happened in their lives and help them, process some of the bad break-up, and things like that, using what we know and using that material. So in that context, it's to help them understand how what they're learning.

Kyla talked about how self-disclosure can help GTAs explain course material in business communication classes:

It also can make things more concrete I think, like in effective business communication. I engage in disclosure in that class about, and I think by disclosure I mean like personal examples of, well, "When I was on the job interview this happened," and so that makes something more tangible or real or practical for them. So it can be like a teaching tool in that way too, so that kind, hopefully positively affect learning.

Theme 4: Remembering course material. The last way that GTAs mentioned self-disclosure positively affecting their courses was improving students' retention of course material. So, not only do GTAs perceive their self-disclosure to enhance their ability to explain course materials, but GTAs also perceive that self-disclosure can help students remember what is taught in class. Dirk, for example, said, *"Occasionally you know, you will see an answer on the final exam or something like that, that is a personal experience that you shared."* Kimberly echoed Dirk's sentiment, by explaining how students are able to recall stories told in class about course material:

I think I have seen sometimes, they will bring back an example that I just threw out there; in a test situation they'll say like, "When you did this," or whatever, "it was an example of this class concept." And so I think it sticks with them a little more than just a hypothetical example that they might have gotten out of a book or something like that. And that always makes me feel good because that's the reason that I would have disclosed in the first place, to stick with them a little more.

Wesley talked about how sharing personal narratives has helped his students to remember course material long after they finished taking his class:

As I've said many times, do rely a lot on storytelling or narrative. You know, I have a lot of stories to tell, but I will have students come back or I will see them when they're – I've taught this class now long ago, I will see the people that I first taught, now graduating and maybe talk to them on the street and they'll say - they remember certain things that I said.

Summary. The third research question asked: How do GTAs describe the results of instructor disclosure on educational outcomes in the classroom? Four different themes were identified in the data in regard to the ways in which GTAs perceive that self-disclosure affects student learning (see Table 5). First, GTAs communicated that they believe that self-disclosure creates an atmosphere of approachability in the classroom (Theme 1). Second, GTAs articulated that self-disclosure can help create a motivation for students to work harder (Theme 2). Third, GTAs perceive that self-disclosure can help demonstrate course material (Theme 3). Fourth, GTAs shared experiences of self-disclosure helping students remember class content (Theme 4).

Chapter three provided an in-depth description of results that arose from the data concerning Communication Studies graduate teaching disclosure. Specifically, themes comprised of research participant responses were examined in regard to three main areas: managing one's self-disclosure, motivations for disclosing personal information, and GTA perceptions of the effects of self-disclosure on learning outcomes. Interview data was examined by research question, and themes were discussed and illustrated by participant answers. The next chapter discusses and positions the results of the current study in relation to past research on instructor self-disclosure. In addition, it examines how this study can contribute to future research.

Table 5

Ways in Which GTAs Believe That Disclosure Affects Student Learning

Themes	Examples
1. Creating an Atmosphere of Approachability and Comfort	<p><i>-So I think the level of self-disclosure...lets them know that I'm an open person...</i></p> <p><i>-One of the most important things in my mind is being able to get the students trust that they can talk to you about things when they're struggling.</i></p>
2. Providing Motivation for Students to Work Harder	<p><i>-I think if your students like you, they probably perform better.</i></p> <p><i>-I think that if someone likes you more, they are more likely to listen to you and more likely to do the work.</i></p>
3. Demonstrating Course Material	<p><i>-Part of my self-disclosure is modeling.</i></p> <p><i>-It also can make things more concrete I think, like in effective business communication.</i></p>
4. Helping Students Remember Course Material	<p><i>-And so I think it sticks with them a little more than just a hypothetical example...</i></p> <p><i>-Occasionally you know, you will see an answer on the final exam...that is a personal experience that you shared.</i></p>

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study was based on the principle that human beings function in relationships through a series of dialectics. One particular dialectic, the openness-closedness dialectic has been examined in this study. The openness-closedness dialectic asserts that individuals must manage a tension between being open or closed when considering self-disclosure. This study examined how individuals manage the openness-closedness dialectic through privacy management rules. Specifically, the study examined how graduate teaching assistants, an essential element of higher education, establish privacy management rules in regard to sharing private information with undergraduate students. The study has also provided knowledge about motivations for GTA self-disclosure. In addition, the research project has provided insight about how self-disclosure affects undergraduate learning.

Three key findings were identified in the data in regard to GTA self-disclosure. First, the study revealed that GTAs *need* to be liked by their students, yet they want to be viewed as credible. I assert that this is a dangerous line to walk, because GTAs often feel disenfranchised, and consequently GTA-student relationships could easily become improper and/or hinder GTAs' ability to manage their classrooms. Second, the data indicated that GTAs set up rules about self-disclosure with students, but these rules differ by context and by GTA. This finding, in combination with the fact that GTAs receive little-to-no training on self-disclosure, leads me to propose that administrators provide guidance for both GTAs and professors on managing private information in the classroom. Third, the data suggested that GTAs believe that self-disclosure is an important behavior in the classroom that can lead to improved student learning outcomes. I propose that a better

understanding of GTA self-disclosure and in increase in training on the subject are particularly important, in light of the importance that GTAs place on the behavior.

In this chapter, I provide an explanation of the key findings and other significant findings of this study and illuminate connections between the findings and research and practice. This chapter is presented in four capacities. First, a brief summary of the findings of the current study is discussed in connection to communication theory. Second, implications for the practice of higher education are highlighted. Third, the limitations of the present research are discussed. Fourth, future research that can build upon this study is considered, as well as conclusive statements.

Summary of Findings

The current study sought to examine how graduate teaching assistants at a large Midwestern university manage their self-disclosure with undergraduate students. Specifically, three research questions were proposed in the study. The first research question driving the study was, “How do GTAs decide what kind of personal information to disclose and what to withhold from undergraduate students in the classroom?” The second research question was, “Why do GTAs decide to either disclose or withhold information from their undergraduate students?” The third research question was, “How do GTAs describe the results of instructor disclosure on educational outcomes in the classroom?”

To obtain answers to the research questions posed, I conducted interviews with 23 GTAs, all from the same Communication Studies Department. Data were inductively coded (Boyatzis, 1998) on three levels: open, axial, and selective (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Data analysis yielded a total 13 overarching themes in participant responses; RQ1 produced three themes, RQ2 yielded six themes, and RQ3 generated four themes. Highlights of

themes found in the data, in order of the three research questions, are briefly noted. In addition, participant responses are discussed in relation to communication theory.

RQ1: How GTAs decide to self-disclose to students. An analysis of the data clearly shows that GTAs do not take self-disclosure lightly. Theme one revealed that participants use topics of self-disclosure as a way to establish boundaries about how far one is comfortable going with sharing private information. This finding supports communication privacy management theory's assertion that individuals consider the content of a disclosure when making decisions about sharing information with others (Petronio, 2004). While striving to balance the openness-closedness dialectic (Baxter, 1988), GTAs make decisions about where boundaries of self-disclosure exist through dialogue with students. It is through dialogue with students that GTAs establish rules about what information to share and what to withhold, which aligns with the tenet of CPM that owners of private information establish rules about disclosure (Petronio, 2002).

Although the data did not provide concrete rules among participants about the nature of all topics self-disclosed in the classroom, the data revealed that each participant makes decisions about what to share and what to withhold based on an understanding of how topics are received by students. This finding is particularly important for GTA classroom and relationship management, because it shows that while GTAs find the topics of their self-disclosure important, rules about what to share and not to share differ by context and by the individual GTA. This finding, among others, points to a need for an open dialogue between GTAs and graduate administrators about what one should and should not share with undergraduate students.

The current study also revealed that there are differences between GTAs and their senior colleagues in regard to the nature of topics disclosed in the classroom. The current study built upon the work of McBride and Wahl (2005) that examined topics that Communication instructors disclose and their motivations for sharing private information. The McBride and Wahl (2005) study showed that instructors most often disclose information about: families, personal feelings or opinions, daily outside activities, and personal histories, while regularly withholding personal information, information about negative personal relationships, sexual topics, and negative aspects of character or image. These findings closely align with the current study on GTA self-disclosure in many regards (see Table 6), but slightly differ with a few topics.

Table 6

A Comparison Between McBride and Wahl (2005) and Current Study

	McBride and Wahl	Current Study
Topics Shared in the Classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families • Personal Feelings/Opinions • Daily Outside Activities • Personal Histories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Aspects of Interpersonal Life • Religion/Politics • Small Talk • Professional Experience
Topics Withheld in the Classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Information • Negative Personal Relationships • Sexual Topics • Negative Aspects of Character or Image 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certain Demographic Information • Negative Interpersonal Relationships • Sex, Drugs, and Alcohol • Trivial Information • Religion/Politics

Compared to prior research, the current study revealed that GTAs are less likely than more senior instructors to discuss their personal feelings and opinions. Although, some GTAs mentioned discussing topics such as religion and politics, they were quick to point out that they would only discuss such topics to frame arguments and not to discuss their own opinions. In addition, several other GTAs shared that they avoid discussing religion and politics altogether. Therefore, it appears that GTAs are less comfortable than more senior instructors at discussing personal opinions in the classroom. This finding is not surprising, given the fact that several participants discussed a fear of speaking openly about their personal lives because of a perceived lack of job security. This finding also implies that GTAs are unsure about what they should or should not share with their students, creating a need for instruction and conversation about how to utilize self-disclosure to maintain professionalism in the classroom.

GTAs were also less likely than their senior colleagues to discuss their families. While participants in both studies discussed a willingness to talk to students about close, personal relationships, participants in the McBride and Wahl (2005) study explicitly mentioned discussing their families, while participants in the current study mentioned talking about dating partners and friends far more than their families. The difference between the current study and the McBride and Wahl (2005) study may simply arise from the fact that GTAs are often younger than professors and more likely to be single (Waldeck et al., 1997). On the other hand, the finding that GTAs are less likely to discuss their families may allude to a GTA perception of a lack of social support from family members. While professors may be able to obtain support from family members, GTAs, often single and younger, may not be able to as easily attain support from loved ones. More research is

needed to validate this claim, but given the fact that GTAs often feel disenfranchised (Lee et al., 2004), experience identity crises (Kasworm & Bowles, 2010), and experience difficulty in completing graduate degrees (Smallwood, 2004), it would be a worthwhile endeavor to examine if GTAs feel that they are supported by loved ones during their graduate studies.

Prior research has also shown that GTA often experience an identity crisis because they are viewed differently by professors and undergraduate students and also have a self-perception that differs from their senior colleagues and students (Kendall & Schussler, 2012). Participants in the current study discussed that the GTA position is one that places individuals in a difficult position of not quite being a person of authority, yet needing to establish authority to manage classrooms. This finding aligns with the Kendall and Schussler (2012) study that posited that undergraduate students see GTAs in an in-between position of not quite being a student, yet not quite a professor. Throughout participant interviews, GTAs regularly talked about feeling a need to balance a tension between being an authority figure and a friend to students. Participant responses echoed the findings of past research on student perceptions of GTAs:

Regardless of type of class, professors are perceived as being confident, in control, organized, experienced, knowledgeable, distant, formal, strict, hard, boring, and respected. Conversely, GTAs are perceived as uncertain, hesitant, nervous, relaxed, laid-back, engaging, interactive, relatable, understanding, and able to personalize teaching. Overall, undergraduates seem to perceive professors as having more knowledge and authority over the curriculum, but enjoy the instructional style of GTAs. (Kendall & Schussler, 2012, p. 187)

Kendall and Schussler (2012) also found that professors view GTAs primarily as research students and apprentices. The current study indicated that many GTAs do indeed learn from some professors in an apprenticeship manor, but it also exposed that many GTAs do *not* learn positive classroom management skills from their professors. Many GTAs do not feel like they are being mentored, at least not when it comes to learning about managing instructor-student relationships. This finding may come from the fact that professors see GTAs as research students, as opposed to teaching students. Practically speaking, this is not surprising, given the typical culture of graduate programs, in which GTAs take five or six research classes and may only take one pedagogy class. In short, the current study, coupled with Kendall and Schussler's (2012) study, implies that professors put more emphasis on developing researchers than developing teachers.

The finding that GTAs balance a friendship-authority dialectic is an important one. Balancing this dialectic causes GTAs to walk a potentially dangerous line between being a friend and being an authority figure. Participants not only discussed the reality of an authority-friendship dialectic, but discussed ways in which they manage the tension. One way that GTAs manage this dialectic is to be strategic in self-disclosure. GTAs often think about why they are sharing private information and try to project what the effects of their self-disclosure might be. Strategic disclosure supports CPM research that asserts that individuals make decisions about private information rules by considering their motivations and completing a risk-reward analysis (Petronio, 2002). While this finding shows that GTAs take their self-disclosure seriously, it also adds support to the data that there is not a clear understanding of exactly what one should self-disclose to undergraduate students. Although the data showed that GTAs draw upon past experiences

to learn about a proper culture of self-disclosure, GTAs still feel a need to measure their self-disclosure in terms of risks and rewards. In other words, this finding simultaneously reveals that GTAs strive for professionalism, yet do not quite have an understanding of how to obtain professionalism through self-disclosure.

RQ2: GTA motivations for self-disclosure. Participants in the current study were asked about the reasons they choose to self-disclose to undergraduate students. In discussing their reasons for sharing private information in the classroom, six clear themes emerged from the data. A key theme that emerged from the data is that GTAs often self-disclose with an intent of building interpersonal relationships with students. The fact that GTAs are motivated to build interpersonal relationships with students is no surprise, as relationships between instructors and students have long been characterized as interpersonal (Frymier & Houser, 2000). In addition, this finding also supports a finding in the McBride and Wahl (2005) study, that instructors' self-disclose in an attempt to connect on an interpersonal level with students. The current study is unique, however, because it indicates that GTAs often feel a need to be liked by their students.

Floyd (2009) defines interpersonal communication as "communication that occurs between two people within the context of their relationship and that, as it evolves, helps them negotiate and define their relationship" (pp. 24 – 25). This definition points to an interdependence between both members of a relationship, which aligns with GTA responses in regard to their motivations for sharing private information. Many GTAs spoke about how they simply want to be liked by their students. In other words, instead of building interpersonal relationships with students to build a rapport for pedagogical reasons, many GTAs spoke wanting to be liked for personal reasons. This finding makes

sense, given the fact that GTAs often feel marginalized (Lee et al., 2004). Participant responses alluded to a reality that some GTAs *need* to be liked by their students; they need to feel important and humanized. This finding has implications for establishing clear boundaries both in training and in practice for the management of interpersonal relationships with students. One could see how a *need* to be liked by students could easily lead to improper relationships with students, if not managed properly. In addition, one could see how needing to be liked by students could hinder one's ability to properly manage a classroom.

The data also suggests that GTA's self-disclose to establish credibility with their students. This finding aligns with prior research that younger college instructors are viewed as less credible than older colleagues (Semplak & Pearson, 2008). Whether GTAs inherently feel that they are not credible or if they pick up on student perceptions, they feel a need to increase their credibility. In addition, participant responses revealed that being younger than professors may not always be a negative. GTAs may be able to use their age to an advantage in the classroom to establish credibility and build relationships with students by self-disclosing about popular culture references that undergraduate students can easily understand and relate to. In other words, being younger than professors does not necessarily have to hinder credibility, but can instead increase credibility.

GTAs also self-disclose to create an environment of reciprocity in the classroom. This finding supports a major principle of a forerunner to CPM, social penetration theory, that self-disclosure is often reciprocal among individuals, especially in the early stages of relationships (Altman & Taylor, 1973). GTAs feel that if they are going to ask their GTAs to self-disclose, then they should share private information, as well. Understanding the

importance of reciprocity in self-disclosure can provide GTAs with a tool to get their students to participate in a wide variety of classes and subject areas. This finding works well in combination with the finding that GTAs often utilize self-disclosure to explain course material, and also aligns with the other motivator for self-disclosure found in the McBride and Wahl (2005) study: to extend course content. In the current study, GTAs spoke about a variety of courses (e.g., public speaking, interpersonal communication, and organizational communication) in which sharing private information can help explain course material, which implies a generalizability among a range of communication courses. This finding also alludes to the pedagogical effectiveness of self-disclosure, and suggests that GTAs should have a number of personal stories at their disposal to better explain course material.

Another theme that emerged from the data in regard to GTA motivations for self-disclosure is that GTAs self-disclose to obtain higher student evaluations. This finding makes sense in light of the dismal employment situation that Ph.D. graduates face upon their graduation. Since almost 70% of academic positions are not tenured (Mason, 2012), GTAs need to be cognizant of the way that their student evaluations affect their ability to obtain professor positions. GTAs are astute to consider the implications of their student evaluations as, "Department chairs and Deans often weigh student ratings heavily in the faculty evaluation process" (Haskell, 1997, p. 36). GTAs need to be even more cognizant of the effects of their student evaluations if they are seeking employment at a teaching university. Emery, Kramer, and Tian (2003) pointed out that student evaluations are "often the most influential information in promotion and tenure decision at colleges and universities focused on teaching" (p. 37). In short, GTAs are rightfully aware of the

importance of student evaluations on their employment status in academia. New GTAs would be wise to continue to consider student evaluations when self-disclosing to students.

RQ3: GTA perceptions of the effects of self-disclosure on learning. GTAs not only believe that self-disclosure can improve student evaluations, but they believe that self-disclosure can be utilized to keep the attention of undergraduate students to explain course material. In other words, GTAs often share private information because they believe it improves student learning. This finding provides qualitative support to the Affective Learning Model (ALM). ALM posits that instructor behaviors, “*cause* students to acquire or increase positive attitudes toward the subject and/or the teacher and in turn, this affective learning *causes* the student to learn cognitively” (Rodriguez et al., 1996, p. 296).

Participants described a number of ways that the instructor behavior of self-disclosure may improve instructor-student relationships, which may lead to improved student learning. Of particular importance to this study are the positive classroom outcomes of student participation, providing social support, and an increase in student motivation to learn.

GTAs conveyed that self-disclosure creates an atmosphere in which students participate more, because they feel comfortable approaching GTAs and asking questions. The data revealed that GTAs want their students to approach them for both educational and social support seeking reasons. Approaching a GTA for educational reasons allows a student to ask questions that can clarify course content and increase one’s understanding of the material. This finding aligns with past research that found that instructor behaviors can increase student participation (e.g., asking questions about course content) in college classes (Rocca, 2008). The current study provides a starting point to build upon studies

such as Rocca's (2008) research on nonverbal immediacy, by showing that GTAs perceive that self-disclosure can also increase student participation.

GTAs also perceive that students often approach them for interpersonal reasons, such as sharing their personal trials. Consequently, GTAs articulated that self-disclosing to students may make students feel comfortable enough to seek social support. Burleson and MacGeorge (2002) define social support as, "verbal and nonverbal behavior produced with the intention of providing assistance to others perceived as needing that aid" (p. 374). The finding that GTAs perceive their self-disclosure as an important tool in being able to provide social support to students is an important one. Murphy and Archer (1996) point out that the higher education can be chronically stressful for some students due to rigorous academic requirements. Therefore, it is imperative that GTAs are available and approachable in order to provide social support for undergraduate students. The current study shows that self-disclosure may be one way that GTAs can better provide social support.

GTAs also discussed how self-disclosure can provide students with motivation to work harder in their classes. This finding fundamentally provides qualitative support to both the affective learning model (Rodriguez et al., 1996) and the motivational model of learning (Frymier, 1994). The motivational model hypothesizes that the relationship between instructor behaviors and student learning is indirect and mediated by student's state motivation to learn (Frisby & Martin, 2010). The two theories of learning differ only in that ALM posits that motivation to learn is better explained as an affective learning construct. Regardless of whether student feelings of enthusiasm are better categorized as motivation or positive affect, both models assert that student motivation can affect student

learning. The current study shows that GTAs agree with this assertion. Therefore, GTAs may be able to use self-disclosure to motivate their students to learn course material.

The finding that GTAs believe that self-disclosure can improve student motivation also adds to vast literature on instructor-student relationships. While past research has shown that behaviors such as instructor-student rapport (e.g., McLaughlin & Erickson, 1981) and immediacy (e.g., Mottet et al., 2005) can improve student learning, the current study shows that GTAs perceive that self-disclosure may improve undergraduate student learning. Participant responses also revealed that improper self-disclosure can also hinder student learning, which lends qualitative support to the assertion that teacher misbehaviors can hinder educational outcomes in the classroom (Goodboy & Bolkan, 2009). This finding, coupled with the central idea of the affective learning model, asserts that self-disclosure can be a positive or negative behavior in the college classroom. This realization is particularly important, given the prevalence of GTA self-disclosure with undergraduate students.

Understanding the effects of self-disclosure on student learning is an important area of research due to the predominance of GTAs in the American higher education system. Johnson (2011) points out that since GTAs often teach first-year students, and that an undergraduate's first year coursework is critical to student retention, it is vital to understand how GTA instruction affects student learning. Numerous past studies have shown a positive connection between instructor behaviors and student learning. For example, behaviors such as clarity (Chesebro & McCroskey, 1998), rapport building (Catt et al.; Frisby & Martin, 2010; Frisby & Myers, 2008; Nguyen, 2007), humor (Gorham & Christophel, 1990), and self-disclosure (Cayanus & Martin, 2008; Down et al., 1988;

Sorensen, 1989) have all been linked to positive classroom outcomes. While many studies have indicated correlations between instructor behaviors and learning outcomes, the vast majority of these studies have followed the tenets of logical empiricism in their research methodology (Friedrich & Nussbaum, 2005). Expressly, most of the studies on instructor-student relationships have utilized quantitative research methods. The current study, however, sought to build upon and strengthen quantitative research on the effects of self-disclosure by examining GTA perceptions of the effects of self-disclosure on students in a qualitative manner.

Implications for Practice

Communication privacy management is a theory “built to be of practice” (Petronio, p. 218, 2007). The current study, rooted in CPM, was also constructed to examine the applied matter of managing GTA self-disclosure in the classroom. In other words, I sought to examine a very practical issue of how GTAs manage their private information with undergraduate students, with the hope of finding results that can be applied to graduate teaching assistant pedagogy. Therefore, in this section, I discuss how the findings of the study relate to implications for practice for both graduate school administrators and graduate teaching assistants.

A very surprising finding of the current study was that few participants had received in-depth training on managing self-disclosure with students. In fact, although participants were deliberately asked about where they learned about proper self-disclosure, only a handful of GTAs mentioned learning about self-disclosure from GTA training. In addition, other participants found it necessary to address that they *did not receive any training* on self-disclosure. The lack of training on the topic is surprising,

because every GTA in the study had gone through a departmental workshop for new GTAs and had taken a semester-long class on pedagogy. Several other GTAs ($N = 10$, 44%) mentioned receiving pedagogy training (i.e., classes, workshops, certificates, etc.) in addition to the aforementioned workshop and pedagogy class, yet they also articulated a lack of training on self-disclosure. Given the importance of self-disclosure on learning outcomes and maintaining positive relationships with students, I suggest that graduate programs implement training initiatives on the topic of self-disclosure in the classroom.

Training could be implemented through GTA professionalization seminars offered through academic departments, through pedagogy classes, or through workshops for new graduate teaching assistants. In each of these settings, the importance of self-disclosure could be illuminated through classroom and group discussions about what to share in the classroom, why one would share private information, and the potential benefits and drawbacks of self-disclosure on learning outcomes. In addition, in each of these settings, case studies of self-disclosure in the classroom could be discussed. Case studies could be either hypothetical and/or could be derived from real experiences in the classroom. The data in my study could provide numerous examples of self-disclosure to discuss in the classroom.

Instruction on self-disclosure could be beneficial to GTAs and to academic departments for several reasons. First, since self-disclosure in the classroom has been linked to positive learning outcomes (Cayanus & Martin, 2008; Down et al., 1988; Sorensen, 1989), GTAs need to be well versed in a behavior that may improve student learning. Second, in light of the bleak job market facing GTAs upon graduation (Mason, 2012) and the difficulty of completing doctoral programs (Golde, 2005), GTAs need to be given a chance

to succeed in their classrooms, which better training could potentially help them achieve. Third, GTAs and communication departments could benefit from training on self-disclosure by avoiding complaints and potential lawsuits from undergraduate students, based on both GTA over-disclosure and responses to student self-disclosure. As participants in this study admitted to making mistakes in their self-disclosure, training on the subject of proper self-disclosure could theoretically reduce over-disclosure. Participants also readily provided examples of undergraduate students over-disclosing in the classroom, which points to a need for GTAs to know how to respond when such instances occur.

Although professors were not interviewed for the current study, another practical implication for graduate administrators could be to include continuing education workshops for professors on the topic of self-disclosure. The importance of this type of training is evident in the finding of the study that GTAs frequently learn about proper (and improper) self-disclosure from their professors. Numerous participants mentioned learning how to self-disclose from their professors, but not all of the examples were positive. In other words, GTAs frequently mentioned that they learned what *not* to do from their professors in regard to self-disclosure. On the other hand, other participants discussed learning proper disclosure from mentors and other professors providing positive examples. Therefore, providing training to professors on self-disclosure could potentially limit the number of self-disclosure mistakes and increase the number of positive examples of self-disclosure that GTAs learn from.

Not only could the current study provide training material for graduate administrators to utilize, but it could also provide a best-practice literature for GTAs to draw from when considering self-disclosure in the classroom. First, GTAs could learn

about topics to employ and avoid in the classroom. Second, upon reading this study, GTAs could learn to be on the lookout for examples of self-disclosure in their graduate classes to learn from, which the study has shown to be an important aspect of learning to manage the openness-closedness dialectic. Third, GTAs could draw upon the findings of the study to learn practical skills to manage a healthy friendship-authority relationship with undergraduate students. Fourth, GTAs could draw upon the current study to consider how their motivations to self-disclose may affect their relationships with students and their students' learning.

Limitations of Present Research

There are five main limitations to the current study. These limitations relate to the research site and participants, participant perceptions in the study, the nature of communication classes, the researcher's perspective in the study, and the role of social desirability on participant responses.

The first limitation is that the research was conducted at one specific location with a relatively homogenous group of participants. The research site for the study was a large university in the Midwest of the United States, which limits the scope of the generalizability of the study. One could not necessarily extend the scope of the findings of the current study to universities in other parts of the country (and world), nor could the findings be generalized to small or mid-size universities easily. Also, it would be hard to extend the findings of this study to departments with GTAs who have a different or diverse demographic makeup, due to the fact that the participants in the current study were quite similar in age and ethnicity. Although the research provides a rich understanding of self-

disclosure in a particular setting, one must be careful not to make claims about self-disclosure in all educational settings.

Second, the research only addressed GTA perceptions of self-disclosure and did not address student perceptions. Therefore, there is no way to be sure that students perceive the self-disclosure behaviors and outcomes discussed by participants in the same way that GTAs do. Further research on undergraduate students is needed to determine if the particular self-disclosure behaviors described by participants actually promote learning in the ways described by participants.

Third, the study only addressed communication classes, which are rife with opportunities for self-disclosure and the sharing of personal stories. Therefore, it would be a stretch to generalize the findings of this study to classes in which self-disclosure is not as frequently utilized. For example, self-disclosure might not be as prevalent in the classrooms of academic areas like calculus or physics. Although GTAs in all academic areas might reasonably self-disclose in small amounts, one could assume that very few academic areas discuss course content that contribute to sharing one's personal experience like communication studies. Therefore, the findings of this study contribute more to the area of communication education (i.e., the study of pedagogy for the discipline of Communication Studies) than instructional communication (i.e., the study of how communication affects all educational settings). In other words, this study richly contributes to communication studies pedagogy and may not extend to other content areas.

Fourth, the study presents perspective issues because of my own recent experience as a GTA. While conducting the first half of the study, I was a GTA, which shaped the way that I asked questions. During the second half of the study, I had just finished my time as a

GTA, which no doubt had an effect on the way that the data were interpreted. Although my position as a GTA provided benefits to the study (i.e., providing me with motivation, giving me easier access to participants, etc.), it could have also narrowed my perspective, by limiting the way that I saw the data to align with how I view GTA self-disclosure and interpersonal relationships between GTAs and students.

Fifth, participant responses seemed to point to a social desirability bias. Social desirability is the tendency for research participants to present themselves in favorable manner (Johnson & Fendrich, 2005). This bias is evident in the data in the ways that participants discussed negative examples of self-disclosure. Participants in the current study regularly discussed how students over-disclosed, occasionally talked about negative self-disclosure from professors and peers, and almost never talked about ways in which they improperly self-disclosed. In other words, participants were quick to point out the faults in others' self-disclosure, but kept relatively quiet about their own faults. Possessing a desire to appear socially desirable makes sense, in light of the fact that I knew all of the participants in a professional manner and regularly interacted with many of them. Had I not known the participants in the study, they may have been more willing to discuss their faults in a more open manner.

Future Research

Although this study provided a starting point for examining GTA self-disclosure, more research is needed to understand the effects of GTA self-disclosure on higher education. I address how future research can build upon the current study in four ways: methodological changes, research at smaller universities, examining the GTA-professor relationship, and researching both sides of the GTA-student dyadic relationship.

While studies have shown a quantitative correlation between instructor self-disclosure and positive educational outcomes (e.g., Mazer et al., 2007), and other studies have shown qualitative support to the benefits of self-disclosure (e.g., McBride & Wahl, 2005), there is a lack of quantitative research on GTA-specific self-disclosure. The current study provided a rich description of the process and effects of GTA self-disclosure, but could be built upon by quantitative research on the same topic. The current study could provide a starting point for more generalizable research on GTA self-disclosure. For example, future studies could survey large numbers of GTAs across a variety of academic disciplines. Future research could also be conducted in an experimental manner to examine whether there is a causal relationship between self-disclosure and enhanced student learning.

In addition, future research projects on GTA self-disclosure could be conducted at smaller universities. Conducting research on self-disclosure at smaller universities would provide a unique perspective due to smaller class sizes and departments, which might provide longer periods of time and more opportunities for GTAs and students to develop relationships. At a smaller university, students would likely take multiple classes from the same instructor, and thus might be more willing to work closely with that instructor. According to the principles of social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973), instructors would naturally self-disclose more to students over time as interpersonal relationships advance.

This study also provides a rationale for more closely examining the effects of professors' modeling self-disclosure and also mentoring GTAs on the topic of self-disclosure. Although a body of research exists (i.e., MacGeorge, Samter, & Gillihan, 2005;

Waldeck et al., 1997) that shows educational benefits of mentoring on graduate students, further research needs to examine the ways in which GTAs learn from their professors in regard to maintaining healthy relationships with students. While some participants spoke about their professors' modeling and discussing ways in which to properly self-disclose, other participants mentioned negative professor behaviors or a lack of mentoring from their senior colleagues.

Future research could also build upon the current study by addressing how self-disclosure is managed by both sides of the GTA-student dyad. Relational dialectics theory (Baxter, 1988) posits that the openness-closedness dialectic is managed by dyads, and although the current study examined one half of the GTA-student dyad, research on self-disclosure could be improved upon by simultaneously researching GTAs and students. More specifically, research on self-disclosure could be conducted on both GTAs and students who are taking classes from the GTAs in the study. Researching the perceptions of GTAs and their students might provide a fuller understanding of how self-disclosure functions in the classroom. Understanding the perspectives of both sides of the instructor-student dyad could also be achieved by conducting a participant observation study wherein the researcher sits in on several classes and observes GTA self-disclosure in action.

Conclusions

This study represents an exploratory examination of graduate teaching assistant self-disclosure. The current study specifically examined how GTAs manage their self-disclosure with undergraduate students. The data uncovered a number of ways in which GTAs make decisions about sharing private information with students. The study also explored GTA motivations for self-disclosure in the classroom. Participant responses

revealed a variety of motivators for sharing, both interpersonal and pedagogical in nature. The research project also provides a much-needed GTA perspective on the effects of self-disclosure on learning. The data indicated qualitative support to varied ways in which self-disclosure affects undergraduate student learning.

The findings of this study not only contribute to the communication literature on self-disclosure, but hopefully will also serve as useful information to both higher education administrators and to graduate teaching assistants. As GTAs are ever-important participants of higher education, the current study seeks to better explain how GTAs balance the in-between position that they function in, especially in balancing a friendship-authority dialectic. Also, as budget constraints on academic departments continue to be a reality, the current study provides GTAs with information that may be useful to managing their classrooms and obtaining high student evaluations. I envision the current study to be utilized as training material on self-disclosure for new GTAs and also as a best practices literature that GTAs can draw from to improve their pedagogical abilities and, in turn, hopefully improve their employability. Above all, my hope is that this research will contribute to improved undergraduate student learning.

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Appendix 1: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPLICATION

4/2010

HSCL # _____
(to be assigned)

UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Application for Project Approval

1. Name of Investigator(s) Nathan G. Webb
2. Department Affiliation Communication Studies
3. Campus or Home Mailing Address: Bailey 102 a.
 Email address: nwebb@ku.edu
 Phone Number(s): (a) Campus: 785.864.3633 (b) Home 417.252.4044
5. Name of Faculty Member Responsible for Project: Dr. Adrienne Kunkel
HSCL must receive faculty approval via email notification or hard copy signature before a student application may be processed.
 - a. Email address of Faculty Member: adkunkel@ku.edu
6. Type of investigator and nature of activity. (Check appropriate categories)
☒ Faculty or staff of University of Kansas
 Project to be submitted for extramural funding; Agency: _____
 KU/KUCR project number: _____
(HSCL must compare all protocols in grant applications with the protocols in the corresponding HSCL application)
 Project to be submitted for intramural funding; Source: _____
☒ Project unfunded
 Other: _____
☒ Student at University of Kansas: ☒ Graduate ☐ Undergraduate ☐ Special
 Class project (number & title of class): _____
 Independent study (name of faculty supervisor): _____
 Other (please explain): _____
 Investigators not from the Lawrence campus but using subjects obtained through the University of Kansas
 Activity to be registered with clinical trials.gov (when registered, notify HSCL of registration number)
- 7.a. Title of investigation: Managing the Openness-Closedness Dialectic: How Graduate Teaching Assistants Handle the Tension
- 7.b. Title of sponsored project, if different from above: _____
8. Individuals other than faculty, staff, or students at Kansas University.
 Please identify investigators and research group:
9. Certifications: By submitting this application via email or hard copy I am certifying that I have read, understand, and will comply with the policies and procedures of the University of Kansas regarding human subjects in research. I subscribe to the standards and will adhere to the policies and procedures of the HSCL, and I am familiar with the published guidelines for the ethical treatment of subjects associated with my particular field

of study. I also certify that I have verified and disclosed any potential conflict of interest between myself and/or my team members and the project sponsor (if applicable). **Type or write name(s) in the signature lines below depending on your electronic or hard copy submission.**

Date: 4/2/12

Signature: Nathan G. Webb

First Investigator

Date: 4/2/12

Signature: Dr. Adrienne Kunkel

Faculty Supervisor

Signature: _____

Second Investigator

Signature: _____

Third Investigator

Project Title: Managing the Openness-Closedness Dialectic: How Graduate Teaching Assistants Handle the Tension

10. Please answer “Yes” or “No” for the following questions about the proposed research activity. (Provide details about questions checked “Yes” on the last page of the application.)

Does the research involve:

no a. drugs or other controlled substances?

no b. payment of subjects for participation?

no c. access to subjects through a cooperating institution (other than KU)?

no d. substances taken internally by or applied externally to the subjects?

no e. mechanical or electrical devices (e.g., electrodes) applied to the subjects?

no f. collection of fluids (e.g., blood, urine, etc.) or tissues from subjects or exposure of subjects to hazardous materials (chemical, biological, radiation, etc.)? Environment Health & Safety (EHS) Approval number (required):

no g. subjects experiencing stress (physiological or psychological)?

no h. omission of information concerning any aspect of purposes or procedures (misleading or withheld information)?

no i. deception of subjects (active misinformation or false feedback provided)?

no j. subjects who could be judged to have limited freedom of consent (e.g., minors, developmentally delayed persons, or those institutionalized)?

no k. any procedure or activities that might place the subjects at risk (psychological, physical, or social)?

yes l. use of participant observation **X** interviews, focus groups,

questionnaires, audio or video recordings? (check all that apply)

no m. data collection over a period greater than one year?

yes n. indicate the consent procedure(s) to be used **X** signed, oral, information statement, parent/guardian, assent procedure for minors or the cognitively impaired (Check all that apply) Note: HSCL makes the final determination on waiver of a signed consent form or consent. Justification must be provided for waiver of signed consent form or consent.

no o. indicate the type of data you will be acquiring in this project private health information, academic records, social security information, KU ID number

no p. other data that may increase participant risk (46.101 (b) (2) (ii) in the areas listed criminal, civil, financial, employment, reputation

11. If any of the key personnel or research team members of this project have a financial interest* in a project sponsor or a provider of goods or services to the project, the individual and the relationship must be disclosed.

X Neither I nor any member of the research team has a financial interest in the project sponsor or a provider of goods or services to this project.

I am disclosing the following financial interest(s)** :

Name of Individual	Role on Project	Financial Interest

* An individual's financial interests include those of the individual, his or her spouse, dependent children, and other members of the personal household (i.e., ownership, compensation received or anticipated, a position of officer or director, or receipt of fees or commissions).

** If this financial interest has not already been disclosed on a Conflict of Interest report, an ad hoc disclosure via the Conflict of Interest reporting form may also be required. Direct inquiries to coi@ku.edu. COI resource information is also available at the following link: <http://www.rcr.ku.edu/coi/index.shtml>

Additional COI Notes:

Complete the following questions on this page. Please do not use continuation sheets.

12. Approximate number of subjects to be involved in the research: 25

13. Project Purpose(s):

The purpose of the study is to examine the ways in which graduate teaching assistants manage self-disclosure with their undergraduate students.

14. Describe the proposed subjects (age, sex, race, or other special characteristics). If there is a physical or mental health condition that characterizes the subjects to be included in the study, please indicate this here as well.

Subjects will be current graduate teaching assistants at the University of Kansas. Subjects will be recruited across all academic disciplines.

15. Describe how the subjects are to be selected. Please indicate how you will gain access to, and recruit these subjects for participation in the project. That is, will you recruit participants through word-of-mouth, fliers or poster, newspaper ads, public or private membership or employee lists, etc. Drawings/raffles are not permitted for payment or recruiting. (If subjects are to be recruited from a cooperating institution, such as a clinic or other service organization be aware that subjects' names and other private information, such as medical diagnosis, may not be obtained without the subjects' written permission.)

Subjects will be recruited through various snowballing techniques, such as word-of-mouth and social networking sites (e.g., Facebook). Subjects will also be recruited through academic departmental emails lists, at the discretion and with the permission of department chairs.

16. Single page abstract of the proposed procedures in the project – consent to the post-project security measures. (The abstract should be a succinct overview of the project without jargon, unexplained abbreviations, or technical terminology. Here is where you must provide details about Yes answers to items under question 10.a through 10.p of the application: drugs, cooperating institutions, medical information requested, security measures and post-project plans for tapes, questionnaires, surveys, and other data, and detailed debriefing procedures for deception projects.)

Participants will be graduate teaching assistants at the University of Kansas. I will go over a written consent form with graduate teaching assistants before I interview them (see Appendix 1). A signed copy of the consent form will be kept by the researcher and an unsigned copy will be given to the participant.

Interviews will begin with basic demographic questions, and will then utilize open-ended questions on self-disclosure to undergraduate students (see Appendix 2). Interviews will be audio recorded by the researcher, and the recordings will be transcribed by a professional transcription company. The data will be coded and analyzed in the Communication Studies department and will be kept in a locked file cabinet in which the door is always locked.

Page 5 of 5

Submit one complete application and supporting documents with your application. Supporting documents may include consent forms, information statement, oral consent procedures, assent procedures, questionnaires/ surveys/research measures, advertisements recruiting participants (e.g. flyers, classified ads, debriefing procedures). You may send all materials via email attachment to janbutin@ku.edu; Campus Mail to HSCL Youngberg Hall; or U.S. Mail to HSCL, Youngberg Hall, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, KS 66045-7568.



Appendix 2: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Nathan Webb
Communication Studies
Bailey Hall, Room 102

4/9/2012
HSCL #20064

The Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL) has received your response to its expedited review of your research project

20064 Webb/Kunkel (COMS) Managing the Openness-Closedness Dialectic: How Graduate Teaching Assistants Handel the Tension

and approved this project under the expedited procedure provided in 45 CFR 46.110 (f) (7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

The Office for Human Research Protections requires that your consent form must include the note of HSCL approval and expiration date, which has been entered on the consent form(s) sent back to you with this approval.

1. At designated intervals until the project is completed, a Project Status Report must be returned to the HSCL office.
2. Any significant change in the experimental procedure as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
3. Notify HSCL about any new investigators not named in original application. Note that new investigators must take the online tutorial at http://www.rcr.ku.edu/hscl/hsp_tutorial/000.shtml.
4. Any injury to a subject because of the research procedure must be reported to the Committee immediately.
5. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity. If you use a signed consent form, provide a copy of the consent form to subjects at the time of consent.
6. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.

Please inform HSCL when this project is terminated. You must also provide HSCL with an annual status report to maintain HSCL approval. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date. If your project receives funding which requests an annual update approval, you must request this from HSCL one month prior to the annual update. Thanks for your cooperation. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Dyson Elms
Coordinator
Human Subjects Committee Lawrence

cc: Adrienne Kunkel

Approved by the Human Subjects Committee University of
Kansas, Lawrence Campus (HSCL). Approval expires one
year from 4/9/2012 HSCL # 20064

Appendix 3: RESEARCH PARTICIPATION INFORMED CONSENT

"Managing the Openness-Closedness Dialectic: How Graduate Teaching Assistants Handle the Tension"

Nathan G. Webb, M.A. and Adrienne Kunkel, Ph.D.

Department of Communication Studies

University of Kansas

Purpose of Research

The purpose of the study is to examine the ways in which graduate teaching assistants manage self-disclosure with their undergraduate students.

Specific Procedures to be Used

The principal investigator of the study will interview participants. **Interviews will be audio-recorded to ensure reliability when analyzing responses.** Interviews will be comprised of demographic and open-ended questions regarding instructor-student rapport. **If you become uncomfortable with the audio recording at any time, we can turn off the tape recorder at your request.**

Duration of Participation

Interviews will take approximately 30-45 minutes.

Benefits to the Individual

There is no direct benefit to individual participants, other than the knowledge that they have contributed to further research regarding student-teacher relationships.

Risks to the Individual

Participants will be at no higher than minimal risk, as they will be asked to discuss typical interactions with undergraduate students. There are no right or wrong answers in the study. Any answers will contribute to the body of knowledge in this area. Thoughtful and in-depth answers will be greatly appreciated for the open-ended questions.

Confidentiality

Neither participants' names nor other identifying information besides basic demographic information will be reported in this study. Names will not be associated in any way with the research findings. There will never be a way for those reading results to connect identity with data. All data collected will become part of a database used solely for research purposes by the researcher only. **Only the researcher will have access to the data, although an assistant will be helping with the transcription process via a password-protected computer. All audio files will be destroyed after transcription and transcripts will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the PI's office and destroyed after five years.**

Voluntary Nature of Participation

You do not have to participate in this research project. If you do agree to participate, you can withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.

Human Subject Statement:

If you have any questions about this research project, contact Dr. Adrienne Kunkel at (785) 864-9884. **In addition, I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429, write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7568, or email irb@ku.edu.**

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS CONSENT FORM AND AM PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT. BY SIGNING AND DATING BELOW I ACKNOWLEDGE THAT I AM OVER THE AGE OF EIGHTEEN AND UNDERSTAND THE INFORMATION WRITTEN ABOVE.

Participant's Signature

Date

Appendix 4: RESEARCHER INTRODUCTION AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introduction

My name is Nathan Webb. I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Kansas, studying interpersonal and instructional communication. I am interested in learning about your experience as a graduate teaching assistant at KU. Specifically, I would like to talk with you about three areas: (1) how you handle disclosing private information to your students; (2) why you decide to either share or withhold private information with students; and (3) how and why you feel that disclosure affects the classes you teach and why.

Before I begin, I'd like to define self-disclosure, so we're on the same page. Simply put, self-disclosure is defined as, "the act of revealing personal information to others." Self-disclosure is not limited to, but includes, sharing private information that you might not typically share with a stranger.

Demographic Questions

1. What is your age?
2. What is your sex?
3. What is your ethnicity/race?
4. What degree are you working on?
5. How many years of teaching experience do you have at KU?
6. How many years of teaching experience did you have prior to coming to KU?
7. What classes or programs (lectures, training) have you received in pedagogy?
8. What jobs have you had outside of academics?
9. What classes have you taught at the university level?

GTA Disclosure Questions (RQ1)

1. Can you tell me about a time that you witnessed someone in a classroom (one of your students, a professor, a classmate) disclosing more information about himself or herself than was comfortable for you? Why did you feel that way? How did others respond to the disclosure?
2. Can you tell me about professors you've had that don't share enough information about themselves?
3. How much information should instructors share with their students? What is too much? What is too little? How do you know?
4. What are topics that you feel comfortable sharing with your students?
5. What are topics that you feel uncomfortable sharing with your students?
6. Tell me about a time that you over-disclosed to your students.
 - How did the class react?
 - What did you do after you realized you over disclosed?
7. How did you learn what you should or should not disclose in the classroom?
8. In what ways, if any, does being a GTA as opposed to a professor make the disclosure process different? If you have plans to be a professor in the future, will

you follow different “rules” about disclosure than you did when you were a GTA?
What would those new rules be?

Motivation Questions (RQ2)

1. How is your self-disclosure outside of the classroom different than in the classroom?
Why do you think it’s the same or different?
2. Why do you think GTAs decide to either disclose (or not disclose) in the classroom?
What do they expect to get out of disclosing to students? Are your motivations similar to that or different?

Instructor-Student Relationship Questions (RQ3)

1. Can you think of examples of how your disclosure has either really helped or hurt your classroom environment?
2. In what ways, specifically, do you think that your disclosure helps or hinders your classes?
3. How do you typically react when one of your students over-discloses to the class?
How do other students react?

Final Question (RQs 1, 2, 3)

1. If you were teaching a workshop to new GTAs about disclosing to students, what advice would you give them?